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President: Mr. Gurirab . . . . . (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Agenda item 34

Dialogue among civilizations

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/546)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.60)

The President: I should like to inform members that, in a letter dated 6 October 1999 addressed to the President of the General Assembly, the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States for the month of October, requests that the Assembly hear in plenary meeting a statement by the observer of Switzerland in the debate on agenda item 34.

Taking into account the importance attached to the issue under discussion, it is proposed that the General Assembly take a decision on that request.

May I take it that there is no objection to the proposal to hear the observer of Switzerland?

It was so decided.

The President: I now call on the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.60.

Mr. Nejad Hosseinian (Islamic Republic of Iran): The countdown for the year 2000 has begun. In a few days we will be entering the third millennium. This is an exciting time to be part of the most universal body and to consider the most relevant topic relating to the nature of our common approach to our common fate in the twenty-first century. It is exciting to begin the new millennium with renewed affirmation of our determination to attempt to achieve the purposes and principles of the Charter through dialogue rather than through the clash of civilizations.

The United Nations is the ideal place to promote and to provide the momentum for dialogue among civilizations and cultures. In fact, Article 1, paragraph 4, of the Charter specifically states that one of the purposes of the United Nations is to be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these ends, which refers to the purposes stated in the Charter. Therefore, the United Nations is the centre to harmonize our actions in order to attain peace and security in conformity with the principles of justice and international law; to develop friendly relations with each other, based on respect for the principles of equal rights and self-determination; to achieve international cooperation through solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character; and to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

These are not easy tasks. History clearly shows us that these are lofty ideals that are very difficult to fully

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achieve at the current level of human intellectual and ethical development. The way in which we currently view human beings and their relations, the world, and the concept and distribution of power represents a real peril to all those lofty goals of achieving real peace, security, justice and prosperity for all.

But as we enter the third millennium, when the world is daily becoming smaller and smaller, the peoples of different cultures are bound to get closer and closer to each other. When the interdependence of nations is a well-recognized fact of everyday life, and when communications and technological revolutions have gained a pace never before imagined, one can only hope that in the logical order of things the intellectual and ethical development of humankind will also gain speed and soon catch up with other advances made by humanity.

In order to facilitate and expedite such progress in human intellect and ethics to the point where the objectives enumerated above would become potentially achievable, we need to engage in serious dialogue in general, and in dialogue of the enlightened, in particular. We need the positive and constructive interactions of cultures and civilizations to nurture one another, and for human life to flourish. It is also through meaningful and genuine dialogue among peoples of diverse cultures, including — perhaps more importantly — the overwhelming majority of the world population who are dispossessed and have no voice, that those objectives may be attained.

Whatever "Dialogue among civilizations" is or may entail, the reactions it has received from world leaders, representatives of Member States and the general public would indicate that there is general agreement that President Khatami's proposal for a sharper focus on dialogue among civilizations and the designation of the year 2001 as the United Nations Year for this theme is not only timely, but a focus whose need is broadly felt. President Khatami has taken every available opportunity to further promote the institutionalization of dialogue among civilizations and cultures and to underscore the positive and humane utility of this paradigm to deal with our common challenges in the twenty-first century.

Without being overly ambitious, I think we should all take the fact that the idea of dialogue among civilizations was well received as a good omen that we will begin the twenty-first century with a step in the right direction, that is, we will seek to promote dialogue, listening, hearing and trying to understand one another. We will seek to promote dialogue in order to enhance mutual respect for, and understanding of, our differences. Dialogue among civilizations and cultures has the potential to take the mere tolerance of diversity a few steps further and enhance the level of discourse to the higher planes of caring, genuine cooperation and constructive engagement. While diversity generates growth and strength and enhances the beauty of human life, it should at the same time promote the solidarity of all human beings. On the one hand, promotion of identities and protection of civilizations and cultures must not become a pretext to shield exclusionism and ultra-nationalism, and on the other, advocacy of universalism must not become a ruse to undermine diversity.

I thank the Secretary-General and his Personal Representative for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations for the report in document A/54/546. I wish Mr. Picco success in assisting the Secretary-General and in translating dialogue among civilizations into practical steps for the United Nations. Operationalization of ideas, particularly ideas that are complex, would of necessity require limiting them. I recognize that need and agree with Mr. Picco's approach for operational definition of dialogue among civilizations. I also wish to reassure him of the support of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his endeavours to enhance a greater appreciation of diversity and to expand the common values of the membership of the United Nations.

Allow me also to express gratitude to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which has always been at the forefront of organizational endeavours to promote inter-cultural programmes to raise mutual respect and understanding among peoples of different backgrounds. I am sure UNESCO will continue to focus on dialogue among civilizations in order to develop a plan of actions to be pursued in the years to come, in cooperation with the Secretary-General.

Many Member States, including my own, have taken initiatives to organize preparatory meetings and conferences for the theme of the United Nations Year in 2001.

It is particularly noteworthy that the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) has established an intergovernmental group of experts to prepare the draft of a major document on global common values to be considered in the United Nations in 2001. The OIC has also decided to draft a ten-year programme of action to

commence in 2001 on the theme of the United Nations Year of the Dialogue among Civilizations.

My delegation is pleased to have had the opportunity to hold two panel discussions on different themes of dialogue among civilizations here in the United Nations, the first in May and the second last month, in November. My intention in arranging these panel discussions was to provide an opportunity to a mixed group of people to hear and exchange views with a select number of distinguished panelists about the first steps we need to take in promoting the long and surely arduous process of dialogue among civilizations. If attendance is any indication, I must say that the panel discussions have been welcomed by many people, including many of my colleagues who are here now. I am grateful to you, Mr. President, and to all members of the Assembly for your participation, comments, guidance and interests. I wish to thank many Permanent Representatives, delegates and United Nations staff members for their support, comments and guidance both in the panel discussions and privately. I am sure that many members of the Assembly would join me in expressing thanks to Mr. Mahbubani, the Permanent Representative of Singapore, for sharing his thoughts and wisdom with us in the second panel discussion.

Here are some of the key points of these two panel discussions which may be interesting to focus on in future debates. Intra-civilizational dialogue is as important as inter-civilizational dialogue. Dialogue among civilizations could lead to expansion of our common grounds and global values. Such dialogue requires, first and foremost, an inclusivist approach in which the interlocutors are equals and genuinely try to hear one another. Dialogue among civilizations promotes tolerance of diversity and more. The savage gap between the absolute minority of haves and the overwhelming have-nots in and among nations, as well as the question of power and its distribution, are perils for serious dialogue among civilizations.

My delegation has been encouraged to think of continuing to arrange constructive exchanges in the format of panel discussions. We are prepared to do that as long as there is an interest. One theme being explored is the potential role that dialogue among civilizations and cultures may have in humanizing the forceful process of globalization.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce, on behalf of the sponsors, the draft resolution entitled "United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations", document A/54/L.60. I wish also to point out for the record that the delegations of Australia, Belarus, Burkina Faso, Greece, Haiti, Malaysia, Malta, Norway, Philippines, Senegal, Slovakia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates and the United States of America have also expressed their wish to be added to the list of sponsors of this draft resolution.

This draft resolution is fairly simple. It has incorporated the factual developments of 1999. It invites Governments, the United Nations system, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and non-governmental organizations to continue and further intensify planning and organizing appropriate programmes to promote the concept of dialogue among civilizations and calls upon Governments to encourage participation by all members of society in promoting dialogue among civilizations.

I wish to make a small oral revision to the seventh preamble paragraph by inserting "a culture of peace" before "remove threats to peace". The paragraph therefore reads:

> "Emphasizing the indispensable role of dialogue as a means to reach understanding, a culture of peace, remove threats to peace and strengthen interaction and exchange among and within civilizations".

The Islamic Republic of Iran and other sponsors hope that all Member States have had an opportunity to review this draft and are in a position to lend their unanimous support to its adoption.

Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Now that we are on the threshold of a new century, in a world undergoing tremendous changes, a world shaped by technological and scientific progress, telecommunications revolution and the rapid exchange of information, at a time when markets are becoming global, we can only hope that all these developments will increase interaction among nations in order to enrich cultures and civilizations and to strengthen the values of peace, cooperation and equality and the spirit of brotherhood among men.

The life of people is guided by their spiritual and material values and mutual interests; this has been the truth at all times and places. Nothing is more important than the enshrining of cultural values and ties among nations and peoples. Culture is the eternal sky that shields us and offers man the best, most favourable

context for the noble values received from our lofty Creator through his divine religions. Culture is multilateral and diverse, and the values it enshrines cannot be realized without cooperation, peace, justice and conciliation. Peace is a right given by God to all his creatures since the beginning of time. Justice is the basis of human coexistence, authentic coexistence. Conciliation is innately necessary to life.

Civilization is mere interaction and convergence among different cultures. What humanity has achieved today, modern civilization, is not just the fruit of the twentieth century. It is the result of the accretion of achievements in culture since the dawn of history. Peoples have enriched human civilization through their scientific endeavours, accumulation of knowledge, ideas and concepts, their achievements and discoveries. Thus we are all partners in the development of today's happiness and suffering. History teaches us that the structure and future of humanity develop through cooperation among peoples; they are born from the positive marriage of well-intentioned minds.

Yesterday we bade farewell to the cold war, and we pray to almighty God to protect us from any hot war as well as from the colder variety. A sense of unease and imbalance in international relations arises from the fundamental changes and the configuration of the international order born out of the Second World War. The unease and imbalance have been fostered by developments at the international level since the end of the cold war.

There are many ideas and conceptions of what is in store for the world after the cold war. All are based on an attempt to find the source of the new conflicts arising from current conditions, conditions that some claim are essential to the development of nations and peoples and are incentives to development and progress. According to some theories, the post-cold-war world will experience clashes of civilizations that will replace ideological clashes, as a result of the demise of communism. These conflicts will guide and in fact dictate States' policies. The fundamental characteristics of the different cultures and civilizations are said to determine interactions within the international community.

Others — forgetting that Islam is a faith and a way of life, not just a theory devised by intellectuals — have maintained that Islam is the greatest threat to the West since the retreat of communism. These people also forget that the interaction among cultures is a two-way street that enriches and elevates cultures and civilizations and increases their vitality.

International conflicts in the past and at present have been and are the result of attempts to impose political and economic hegemony, expand empires, consolidate zones of influence and so forth. Even ideological confrontations were conflicts designed to polarize and influence the other elements at work. Quite logically, the international community no longer accepts a unilateral perspective of world problems and rejects the predominance of a single community that seeks to subject the rest of the world to the values and interests of a single civilization.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been honoured by the Almighty. It has been endowed with the most important and sacred shrines of Islam. As the Koran, reflecting the sentiments of God Almighty, says:

> "O mankind! We created
> You from a single (pair)
> Of a male and a female,
> And made you into
> Nations and tribes, that
> Ye may know each other.
> Verily the most honoured of you
> In the sight of Allah
> Is (he who is) the most
> Righteous of you." (*The Holy Koran, XLIX:13*)

On the basis of this divine invitation to consolidate the links among human beings for the well-being of humanity, we support last year's General Assembly proclamation of the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. We congratulate the Secretary-General for having appointed a Personal Representative to handle this very important matter. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also supported this proclamation during the twenty-sixth session of the Organization of the Islamic Conference — which was called the session for peace and partnership for development — held in Burkina Faso from 28 June to 1 July 1999. We attach great importance to the pursuit of the dialogue among civilizations as a way of building understanding among peoples and of finding a common basis for the development of the human mind in order to build peace and cooperation and avoid confrontations.

We appeal to the international community to use dialogue to fight selectivity, particularly to fight any vilification of Islam. Islam is a religion of peace and cooperation. It is undergoing a harsh onslaught and is

oppressed by attempts to link it with terrorist movements. This discriminatory attitude reveals an extremist turn of mind quite inappropriate to a culture of tolerance. Terrorism is an international phenomenon not confined to a single people, race or religion. Unfortunately it crops up everywhere, and we have to make every possible effort at the international level, including through the United Nations, to confront this phenomenon, in order to put an end to this scourge and protect the lives of the innocent and help States maintain their sovereignty and stability.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia hopes that the dialogue among civilizations will bring about a convergence of individual freedoms and collective rights. Such a convergence would promote respect for collective rights and positive interaction among policies and the interplay of the creative spirit of all peoples. A better future will thus be brought about through the establishment of peace, security, stability, solidarity, development and cooperation and by encouraging people to respect the characteristics and cultural diversity of peoples and civilizations.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran for its initiative to promote the concept of dialogue among civilizations within the United Nations. I would also like to welcome the appointment of Mr. Giandomenico Picco as Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. I am confident that his distinguished experience and expertise will contribute to enriching, enhancing and promoting the concept of dialogue among civilizations.

I am honoured to speak today before the Assembly on behalf of a homeland and a State which is the cradle of civilization and the wellspring of cultures, a State that affected and was affected by human civilization. Egypt believes that the diversity of human cultures has been a source of strength and enrichment for humanity and should not be a reason for division and conflict. Egypt, the Pharaonic, Coptic and Islamic nation with close contacts with the Roman and Greek civilizations, will forever continue to be open to the world, believing in dialogue, tolerance, coexistence, justice and solidarity.

We, the peoples of the world, have taken it upon ourselves — on the basis of the joint ethical values of our various civilizations and regardless of our culture, language or religion — to save the world from the catastrophes of wars, to cooperate and seek understanding in order to achieve humanity's aspirations for peace, security, prosperity and development.

Yet regretiably, instead of taking the path of coexistence and peace, the world — at least in the twentieth century — has witnessed different forms of ethnic, tribal, religious and regional crises and conflicts. It has also suffered from exacerbated economic crises and nuclear and environmental dangers. Moreover it has been victimized by irrational uses of technology and of scientific progress.

Hence, it is necessary to activate dialogue among civilizations, regardless of their differences, in order to identify minimal intellectual, ethical and scientific common denominators through which we may cooperate to preserve the dignity, values, freedoms and particularities of humanity. We are duty-bound not to allow theories that espouse clashes among civilizations, with their pessimistic world-views, to become self-fulfilling predictions. While our diverse cultures without exception have given birth to any number of warmongers, tyrants and destroyers they have also given birth to great leaders, peace advocates, inventors, scientists, explorers and politicians who have registered many achievements.

Undoubtedly, dialogue among civilizations commands special importance as we approach the third millennium. Through it, we stress the resolve of our world and its diverse cultures to adopt a new approach based on common concepts and goals unencumbered by intellectual, cultural or religious beliefs and ideologies. History has shown that interaction based on mutual respect and benefits has been a cardinal element of the prosperity of many civilizations through the ages. Common endeavours to achieve understanding and cooperation among peoples and nations with different trends and cultures have contributed directly to the progressive development of the international community as a whole.

I wish to refer here to the statement made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt in the general debate at the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. He stated:

> "Humanity's attainments at this time and in this age are not the fruit of the achievements of the twentieth century alone; rather, they are the result of the accumulated achievements made since the beginning of time. The Egyptians excelled at science and

engineering and were the first to profess monotheism. The Babylonians gave the world the alphabet. The Phoenicians mastered navigation. The Arab civilization flourished in al-Andalus, preserved Greek philosophy and added to it. The Islamic civilization in Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey made great contributions to all aspects of life. The Renaissance in the Italian city-States followed. Then came the French Revolution, advocating the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The industrial revolution started in Britain. America ushered in the computer, information and communication revolutions and the age of space exploration and atomic energy. I would also refer here to the profound philosophies and great civilizations that flourished in China, India, Japan and elsewhere.

"This is a necessary statement of fact as we bid farewell to this century and this millennium. Everyone must be aware that we are all partners in the creation of the contemporary genius. Yet the future is our real concern. The future brings with it new challenges in the fields of science and information; economic and monetary matters; culture, politics and security; and the conduct of relations between peoples and societies." (*A/54/PV.10, p. 19*)

Convinced that we are one international community based on intellectual pluralism and religious and cultural diversity, and that each nation is entitled to preserve its identity and characteristics, we believe that this diversity and these characteristics do not and should not weaken the unity of the international community. On the contrary, they reinforce that unity, which is based on honest competition, positive coexistence and joint appreciation of the accomplishments of all societies. The pride of every nation in its own civilization and history, and its adherence to its religion, traditions and customs should not be interpreted as declarations of war or as challenges to any specific ideology or civilization. Equality in sovereignty and the freedom of each society to choose suitable ideologies, traditions, customs and so on are legitimate demands that prompt us to emphasize the non-superiority of any civilization over another, regardless of its power, its military, economic and scientific development in any given era, the number of its accomplishments or the popularity of its beliefs and ideologies.

The main aim of the dialogue among civilizations should be to focus on the creation of a new world in which the particularities, values and nature of cultures and the patterns of traditions of all societies are respected. Respect for cultural diversity and the promotion of equality among cultures undoubtedly represent the loftiest indicators of civilization.

We are compelled in this regard to discuss globalization and its relationship to dialogue among civilizations. The transcendence of the barriers of space and time and interaction among peoples and societies are the most important consequences of the growth of globalization, which is the natural corollary to unprecedented and stunning scientific progress and its facilitation of the means of transport, communication, information and informatics technology.

Some people believe that globalization, given its tendency to unify the world economically and politically, is designed to undermine cultural pluralism and to threaten the civilizational particularities of peoples and nations. In Egypt, we do not accept this viewpoint, since the culture of any people is the product of a unique historical development and of deep social interactions that have left their mark and reveal themselves in conduct, trends and values. Hence, it is logical that most societies in our contemporary world do not accept this unilateral view of universal problems or the way to overcome them. They are also right in rejecting the hegemony of one society's interests and the subjection of the world's civilizations to the developments and considerations of one specific civilization and its interests.

Quite candidly and explicitly, some in the Western world imagine that Western civilization, in its European and American halves, reigns supreme over all of us. They also believe that it should impose its lifestyles and concepts on all walks of life, be they economic, social or political. They also believe that there are other, inherently hostile, civilizations that should be oppressed by force.

In Egypt, we are opposed to this flawed reading of current relations among civilizations. We do not deny, nor should we, that there are focal points or meeting points among civilizations, be they in place or time. This is a natural condition that has prevailed throughout human development and the progress of civilization. It will continue to be thus forever. What we wish to emphasize and what we will uphold is that these focal points will not clash, but will lead to contacts, dialogue and attempts at mutual understanding of the circumstances and particularities of each specific society. Attempts to exercise pressure and to obtain gains in terms of time or space will undoubtedly be resisted. This is not

in the interest of humanity's future or the development of human civilization in all its aspects and dimensions. The real challenge we should all meet lies in safeguarding cooperation, understanding and dialogue from aggression and dominance.

Throughout history, the world has witnessed the emergence of great empires that represented great civilizations. Over the ages, these empires clashed with one another and faded away. Yet, civilizations continued to emerge. Undoubtedly, this human experience leads us, as it should, to the logical conclusion that division and conflicts do not achieve development or progress; rather, dialogue, contacts, understanding and coexistence are keys to achieving a peaceful world free of conflicts, wars and attempts at hegemony and domination.

Despite the challenges and tragedies experienced in the twentieth century, we still sense a certain optimism in working together to achieve our aspirations in the new millennium. We want a better future for our citizens and peoples. We want the rights of peoples and nations to be respected, without disagreement on priorities and definitions. We wish that our joint political work would become stronger without applying double standards. We want real development that does not deepen poverty or ignore its causes. We want a clean environment and technology and science that are useful to all. Lastly, we want commitment to law and respect for the traditions and the purposes and principles agreed upon in the United Nations Charter.

In the course of this decade, and for the past two decades, the world has witnessed rewarding developments in the field of dialogue among religions and attempts at constructive coexistence and mutual understanding. These developments are supported and shared by Egypt in the strongest terms. We should admit that we will not achieve our aspirations unless we achieve serious and constructive dialogue among civilizations, based on mutual respect and equality.

The United Nations, as an assembly of various civilizations and cultures, can certainly play a vital role in merging the various viewpoints and enhancing such cooperation and understanding. The adoption by the General Assembly of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace highlights our commitment to work within the Organization for a better future. The culture of peace — as a set of values and codes of conduct based on the principles of freedom, justice, democracy, development, respect for human rights, tolerance, solidarity, equality, parity, uniform standards, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, prohibition of aggression and occupation, respect for pluralism, sovereignty and the unique character of each society — is an effective step in enhancing dialogue designed to achieve mutual respect and coexistence.

Mr. Ka (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): When it decided to declare the year 2001 the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, the General Assembly was mindful of the importance of building a world of peace, mutual understanding, tolerance and complementarity among nations, peoples and individuals. It has thus placed this event within the context of attaining the noble objectives of our Organization.

My delegation wishes to pay a sincere tribute to President Seyed Mohammad Khatami for having launched this important initiative and for his personal efforts to promote such a dialogue under United Nations auspices and within other organizations, such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

From the very outset, my delegation associated itself with the welcome initiative of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran precisely because this timely initiative came along at a moment when the world was wracked by doubt and trends that threaten to reduce life in society to material relationships without any soul to them. This initiative also came at a time when, with globalization and the tendency towards uniformization, small countries were in danger of losing their identity, their culture and their heritage.

Last year I said that globalization of the economy, culture and thought, as well as increasing interdependence among nations on the eve of the third millennium, meant that we needed to have a new vision of international relations, one ruling out confrontation, racial hatred and xenophobia. It is the diversity of the world that is its wealth but the strength of tomorrow's world is contingent on its ability to cultivate a spirit of peace, tolerance, dialogue and solidarity among the different actors.

It is therefore fortunate that the Islamic symposium on the dialogue among civilizations, held last May in Teheran, adopted the Teheran Declaration, which defines the principles, the areas and the mechanisms of this dialogue.

It is true that the underlying issues of the dialogue among civilizations are not foreign to the United Nations. Although not entirely new, they are still topical and pertinent in the context of our contemporary world and in view of the great challenges facing humankind at the end of this century and this millennium.

In recent years, the General Assembly has adopted several resolutions or declarations advocating dialogue, understanding and respect for differences. In resolution 48/126 the Assembly proclaimed 1995 as the United Nations Year for Tolerance. In 1996, the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance was adopted. In 1997, the Assembly decided to proclaim the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace. Finally, in 1998 the decade 2001-2010 was proclaimed the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World. All of these initiatives reflect our common commitment to promote an era of cooperation and understanding among the various civilizations of our planet in order to uniquely affirm our shared human values.

I congratulate the Secretary-General for his hands-on involvement in this issue in appointing a Personal Representative last August for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, Mr. Picco. From the provisional report Mr. Picco has submitted, we see in particular that the dialogue among civilizations assumes many forms, ranging from the cultural dialogue between Islam and the West to dialogue among the major religions, including cultural and political exchanges among the heritors of historic civilizations.

This dialogue has become necessary and can help to prevent and control conflicts and rationally manage the differences and identities of each culture and of each tradition, all the while promoting the expansion of human values that we all share.

Today, more than ever before, our world must face all types of racial, religious, ethnic, cultural and political intolerance. It must allow diversity of culture and civilization. But I hasten to add that the promotion of cultural diversity does not mean refusing to take into account universal values such as respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It cannot mean acceptance of harmful discrimination against women or denial of the rights of the child.

Mr. Ikouebe (Congo), Vice-President, took the Chair.

My delegation is firmly convinced that the United Nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), other agencies such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the non-governmental organizations can play a central role in the promotion of a fruitful intercultural dialogue among civilizations. This dialogue is a necessity, even within the same civilization. As was quite rightly noted by the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, most of the recent conflicts in which the United Nations was asked to intervene or to serve as mediator are ethnic, tribal or religious conflicts, conflicts which could have been avoided or resolved in time if a spirit of dialogue and tolerance had prevailed among the parties.

Before I conclude, I would like to recall some wise advice taken from a recent work by a man of great culture, Mr. Ghazi Algosaibi, the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to London. He observed that when one is presented with a conflict as being a shock between cultures one must show scepticism and analyse the question. Never lend credence to the myth of a homogeneous culture, according to Mr. Algosaibi, because even within the same religion there are many schools. Never generalize about a culture on the basis of individual experience. When one observes other cultures, one should look for similarities, rather than differences, with one's own culture. When one observes different types of behaviour in other cultures, one should look for the reasons. We are all the products of history and geography. We do things in a certain way because we are conditioned by the time and place in which we live. However, we do tend to make our own lifestyle a kind of norm, and we very often judge and criticize other cultures by the same yardstick. I will conclude where Mr. Algosaibi concluded, by asking everyone not to believe everything they read in books, magazines or newspapers about other cultures.

To illustrate this last point, Mr. Algosaibi cites the example of a student who concluded his university studies and went to Europe for the first time. He stopped in the beautiful city of Zurich. Shortly after his arrival there, a chambermaid in his hotel came to prepare his bed for him. The student immediately approached her and kissed her on the mouth. The chambermaid slapped him, which annoyed and surprised the student. He was annoyed and surprised by this unexpected reaction from the chambermaid precisely because, in all Western films that he had seen, women seemed to be ready to kiss men, and he thought that this was normal behaviour.

This example, albeit amusing, is terribly serious, because all stereotypes, throughout the world, are the result of inaccurate information or of deliberate disinformation. And, stereotypes persist. In order to do away with them we must act within our national programmes to promote the concept of dialogue among civilizations. We need to act on at least three fronts. We need to educate young people, particularly about intra- and inter-civilizational dialogue and the relationship between traditional values and modern values. We need to raise the consciousness of the media moguls about their central role in bringing civilizations closer together. We must see to it that all later initiatives mainstream the idea of tolerance and sharing the differences that enrich us.

In conclusion, dialogue among civilizations is possible and more than ever desirable at the dawn of the third millennium. To build an edifice of understanding among nations and peoples the United Nations is still, we feel, the ideal context for promoting, expanding and gaining acceptance for our diversity in the difference of our cultures, of our religions and of our traditions.

Let us therefore together, here and elsewhere, cultivate our values of human solidarity, our values of tolerance, our values of openness and dialogue and, as was advocated more than 40 years ago by the former President/poet of Senegal, Mr. Leopold Sedar Senghor: let us see to it that all of the fruitful elements of the values of our diverse civilizations come together at the banquet of our universal civilization.

Mr. Samhan (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to join previous speakers in welcoming the report of the Secretary-General, which contains extremely important proposals and suggestions on the agenda item concerning dialogue among civilizations. The General Assembly debate on this item coincides with the coming of the third millennium long awaited by our peoples in the hope of realizing our aspirations for human, cultural, social and economic development and the resolution of conflicts by peaceful means on the basis of the Charter and of respect for the sovereignty of international law. In today's world environment, the international community has been unable to settle a number of conflicts related to lasting peace, security and sustainable development. In light of this fact, the dialogue among civilizations is of particular importance as regards the interaction and participation required to solve these problems.

The United Arab Emirates firmly believes that civilizations with their diversity and unique development and features are the root of rules, principles ideologies and values for all States which have a rich past. This is true of the past and of the present. The permanence of those civilizations with their material, intellectual, spiritual and hereditary components, and their interaction with the environment out of which they grew, have produced a cultural heritage that characterizes different peoples and nations.

From this perspective, the United Arab Emirates has adopted Arab, Islamic civilization and Islamic law as its code of conduct. Islam considers man the representative of God on earth, where man must enshrine the principles of justice, peace, social responsibility and equal rights and duties. Islam enshrines these noble values for the sake of the transcendence of man. Man is a living pivot of interaction among civilizations in their different dimensions.

This spiritual and divine method is the root of legislation for consolidating right, justice and tolerance in a world where peace, security, stability and development must reign through spiritual and intellectual dialogue and communication. We must develop our cultural capital with strength and authenticity in order to achieve a civilization based on justice, knowledge and equality; a civilization that rejects aggression, occupation, ethnic and religious genocide and all forms and manifestations of international terrorism. This civilization must also promote tolerance, peaceful coexistence and consolidation of the culture of peace. It must build bridges of friendship and cooperation for the mutual benefit of all peoples and nations. This is where civilization has an essential role to play in the development of man and society. Civilization must protect the human characteristics and spiritual particularities in order to protect itself from disappearing. It must enrich the world and develop methodically irrespective of race, language, colour, religion, affiliation and so on.

God says in the Koran:

O mankind! We created
You from a single (pair)
Of a male and a female,
And made you into
Nations and tribes, that
Ye may know each other.
Verily, the most honoured of you
In the sight of Allah

> Is (he who is) the most
> Righteous of you. (*The Holy Koran, XLIX:13*)

The United Arab Emirates reaffirms the right of all States and peoples to preserve their cultural heritage, their civilization and religious beliefs. We firmly believe that cultural diversity is an essential and important component of the development and enrichment of the common cultural heritage of mankind and the thinking processes of man. These are the essential elements that brought humanity to the level of civilization we experience today.

We therefore support any efforts to enshrine a constructive, objective dialogue among as many civilizations and countries as possible in order to solve standing problems and to avoid all forms of aggression, ethnic or racial discrimination, conflict and occupation, any stockpiling of dangerous weapons, particularly nuclear weapons, and recourse to force or the threat of the use of force, particularly in times of conflict.

We restate the right of peoples to self-determination, the right to eliminate poverty and illness, the right to narrow the widening gap between developed and developing countries and the right to terminate all violations of human rights and pollution of the environment.

Finally, we believe that today's world is based on religious, intellectual and cultural diversity and mutual interests. This must not infringe on the national and regional sovereignty of States but should consolidate bilateral and multilateral relations among them, and should strengthen the principles of peaceful coexistence among peoples and respect for their historical and cultural heritage and achievements.

Ms. Ibraimova (Kyrgyzstan): Kyrgyzstan welcomes the idea of the dialogue among civilizations and highly appreciates the draft resolution prepared under the thorough attention paid by the Permanent Mission of Iran, which initiated and coordinated all the preparatory work.

Kyrgyzstan is one of the sponsors of the draft resolution, as it has a strong commitment to contribute to the efforts of the international community to live in a world enriched by the cultural, philosophical, spiritual and economic heritage and experience gained by all countries from East to West.

The idea of the dialogue among civilizations is followed by the doctrine of the Kyrgyz President, His Excellency Askar Akayev, entitled "Diplomacy of the Silk Road". The doctrine was distributed to all delegations as an official document of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly (A/53/396, annex). I want to recall that one of the main ideas of "Diplomacy of the Silk Road" was that

> "The renaissance of the Great Silk Road under the new historical circumstances refutes the ideas that were current in the past, which at times artificially contrasted the ways in which the East and the West perceived and viewed the world as totally incompatible with one another. Fortunately, ideas of planet-wide significance and scale are now predominant in the minds and hearts of the peoples inhabiting the region of the Road."

and that

> "The geography of the Great Silk Road has no bounds or limitations.
>
> "...
>
> "While in the past the Great Silk Road played the role of a connecting bridge, now, in a situation of globalization, the destiny of the Road extends far beyond the framework of this dimension alone."

Interdependence has become a completely new phenomenon of the end of the twentieth century. Globalization has led to an awareness of the unarguable fact that no country, however powerful it may be in military and economic terms, can face alone challenges such as the arms race, conflicts, extremism and terrorism, the illegal manufacture, distribution and consumption of narcotic substances, natural disasters and those brought about by man, and crying social needs that call into question the survival of the whole of mankind.

As one of the mechanisms to promote the dialogue among civilizations, Kyrgyzstan is ready and able to act as a binding link among all the Great Silk Road countries.

I would like to use this opportunity to stress that it is highly symbolic that the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations will be followed in 2002 by the International Year of Mountains. Mountains and highlands make up more than a quarter of the Earth's land surface and are home to about 10 per cent of its population. Therefore all the problems, values and mentality of the peoples living

in mountainous areas are common, irrespective of which part of the world those mountains are found. The idea of the dialogue among civilizations is therefore continued into the Year of Mountains on the basis of the belief that human beings and nations can build a better world through peaceful discourse, mutually beneficial interactions and the definition of common values.

Mr. Hasan (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): The progress made by mankind is the outcome of the achievements of peoples since the dawn of history: from the civilizations of Mesopotamia to the Phoenician and Egyptian civilizations and those of India, China and Latin America, including the Arab Islamic civilization, the European Renaissance and, finally, the information revolution and the conquest of outer space. As civilization is the common heritage of all mankind, it must cope with the challenges of the present and the future in a concerted manner.

My country, Iraq, is proud that it was the cradle of ancient civilizations — the Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian and Assyrian. The creativity of Iraq continued and attained its apogee when Baghdad became the capital of the Arab Islamic State, whose achievements in science, the arts and literature were a bridge of creativity between ancient civilizations and modern times. This has helped mankind in its present achievements. Arab Islamic civilization concretized the concepts of dialogue among civilizations, tolerance and balance between the spiritual and material needs of mankind. The Arab nation is capable of continuing its historic mission by taking an active part in creating mankind's civilization.

In this century, mankind has seen destructive conflicts whose roots go back to hegemony, evil tendencies, aggression, racism, colonialism, illusions of racial supremacy, the arms race, economic disparity and the illegal use of force. As we approach the third millennium, the international community must put a stop to these destructive tendencies and seek common ground among peoples and nations. We believe that the main means of bringing about such a change is to activate dialogue among civilizations in order to lay the foundations of a new world order on the basis of the rule of law and respect for the cultural diversity of nations, so as to guarantee social, economic and political progress for everyone.

In order to move towards that goal, States must establish and implement cultural, educational, social and informational programmes to strengthen the concept of dialogue among civilizations and to consolidate human values. This should be done, first, by respecting equality among all peoples and States; secondly, by accepting cultural and intellectual diversity as a permanent feature of human society; thirdly, by fostering mutual respect and tolerance between civilizations and the preservation of the cultural and spiritual values and heritage of all civilizations; fourthly, by rejecting hegemony and domination of one culture over another; and fifthly, by cooperating to put an end to the dangers posed to international peace and security, such as hegemonistic political and economic tendencies, aggression, the arms race and the degradation of the environment.

We need to take the cultural dimension and respect for humankind's cultural and spiritual values as our basis. This is the best way to overcome the arrogance of power, predominance of materialism and non-respect for peoples.

If we wish to build a culture based on human civilization and achievements, we cannot then have the Foreign Minister of some super-Power boast that the sanctions imposed in the name of the United Nations have killed 500,000 innocent Iraqi children. Nor would we be witnessing this terrible situation where a minority of northern countries lives in abundance whereas a billion people are dying of hunger in the South, or where a minority of countries possesses nuclear weapons that can destroy the whole world several times over and uses these weapons to threaten and blackmail other peoples.

In conclusion, we must reaffirm the pivotal role of the United Nations in preparing and implementing cultural, social and educational programmes to consolidate this idea of dialogue among civilizations, with a view to creating a model for international relations based on integration, not exclusion, and on a culture of peace based on justice, equality, freedom, democracy, respect for human rights and development.

Mr. Jasmi (Malaysia): My delegation is pleased to note that the initiative calling for a dialogue among civilizations has received tremendous support from various quarters ever since the Islamic Republic of Iran first mooted it in the Assembly. It is a commendable initiative which my delegation and many others have wholeheartedly supported. It is also timely: as humanity stands on the threshold of the new millennium, a fruitful dialogue among civilizations would be a major contribution to promoting a culture of understanding and tolerance among humankind which hopefully would characterize at least the next century, if not the next millennium.

Ibn Khaldun, the illustrious fourteenth century Muslim historian and political scientist, in his pioneering work, *The Muqaddimah*, has pointed out that cultures and civilizations cannot exist without depending upon other cultures and civilizations. He believed that humankind is fundamentally social in character and that human societies are invariably dependent upon other societies as a source of alternative ideas, values and knowledge, and, of course, for trade. It is this dynamic of contact, exchange and interaction that keeps the vital pulse of any culture or civilization alive, as otherwise it will go through a process of stagnation and decay.

In the contemporary world the process of globalization has brought about greater interaction between nations and civilizations. While this process may yield a lot of positive results, there is also the potential for cross-civilizational misunderstanding or even conflict, and there is ample evidence of this — hence the imperative need for the international community to formulate appropriate strategies and programmes aimed at greater intercivilizational dialogue and understanding.

We need to revitalize those attitudes, which Ibn Khaldun himself regarded as the most crucial for the development of a dynamic and healthy civilization. This includes the need to be honest and critical about one's own cultural tradition and civilization, the need to remain open towards other alternative cultural viewpoints, and the need to emphasize the importance of a just and equitable relationship between civilizational and cultural groupings. It is only through the inculcation of these attitudes and their application that we can dispel the myth of cultural exclusivity and superiority.

At the same time, we need to intensify the struggle for justice, fairness and equality within the world order itself, for without them the non-dominant nations and civilizations will continue to be marginalized, making it difficult for them to voice their concerns and aspirations, let alone promote their legitimate agendas. This would naturally create a sense of frustration among sections of the global community, which would not be conducive to dialogue and harmony among nations and civilizations.

We believe that only through frank and sincere dialogue will we be able to foster mutual understanding, appreciation and respect among nations and civilizations. In this regard, my delegation is gratified that the Islamic countries have already embarked on a journey to promote dialogue among various cultures and civilizations with the adoption of the Teheran Declaration on Dialogue among Civilizations by the member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) on 5 May 1999.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the continuous efforts being made by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the OIC secretariat in promoting this initiative at the international level. My delegation would like to reaffirm our support for the Teheran Declaration, which contains constructive proposals for the advancement of this initiative. We hope that other countries will do likewise. We would also like to congratulate the organizers of the recent seminar on "Dialogue among Civilizations", which was held here just recently, on the success of the seminar, which enjoyed an overwhelming response and support from Member States.

It is sad that despite the tremendous achievements of human civilizations, humanity has not been able to overcome the age-old problems of human conflicts, which continue to rage in many parts of the world, claiming so many lives and squandering so many of our scarce resources. Surely we and future generations of humanity cannot be content to accept this state of affairs as an inescapable fact of the human condition. Surely, with the increased level of our sophistication — intellectual and material — humanity should be able to effect a paradigm shift in our handling of the conflicts that have plagued our planet, moving from recourse to the use of arms in the settlement of conflict to a path of dialogue, understanding and conciliation.

In this regard, we believe the media has an important role to play. Instead of indulging in typical sensationalism and pandering to popular prejudices, which feeds on people's latent suspicions, fears and hatreds, the media should act more responsibly, conscious of the knowledge that what they put out has an enormous impact on the population at large. It should be guided by the need for objectivity and should refrain from the easy and careless stereotyping of peoples and behaviour to pander to the popular need to find scapegoats for every act of violence that occurs. It is regrettable that Muslims in particular have been the target of such stereotyping by the media, which does great harm to the cause of greater understanding between nations and civilizations.

In the complex, interdependent world of today, we cannot afford to have a clash of civilizations. Rather, we should endeavour to learn and absorb the good values of each other's civilizations. We should attempt a synthesis

of our best thoughts and ideas and synergize our efforts towards the goal of creating better understanding among humankind based on increased tolerance in an increasingly multicultural world, thereby guaranteeing a joyous celebration, instead of a clash, of civilizations.

As a multiracial, multireligious and multicultural nation, Malaysia fully understands and appreciates the paramount importance of harnessing cross-cultural understanding in its efforts at nation-building since its independence in 1957. Through the process of communal dialogue and the practice of tolerance, Malaysians have been able to live in harmony, goodwill and peace. The country has, in fact, benefited from the fusion of civilizations by harnessing the cultural variety and richness of the various races that make up Malaysia. We truly believe that there can be unity in diversity. Indeed, as a model of multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-civilizational, yet united, nations, we are happy to share with others the experience we have accumulated during the 42 years we have existed as a nation.

My delegation believes that the United Nations can and should play a pivotal role in developing and promoting dialogue among civilizations. Through dialogue, a new, universal set of values or norms could be evolved that would form the basis for creating better understanding among nations. We believe that this Assembly and the other United Nations organs and agencies, especially the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, could all contribute to inculcating increased awareness of, and sensitivity towards, civilizational differences and take due cognizance of them in formulating their work programmes and strategies.

In this connection, my delegation welcomes the recent appointment of Mr. Giandomenico Picco as the Secretary-General's Personal Representative for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. We trust that with his vast experience and knowledge, Mr. Picco will be able to accomplish the task of making the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations in 2001 a successful and memorable one.

The new millennium ought to be different from past millenniums of human history, which have been characterized by wars and conflicts arising out of misunderstanding, bigotry and intolerance as much as of sheer competition for hegemony and resources. As the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mr. Mahathir Mohamad, wrote in his recent book, *A New Deal for Asia*:

> "a World Century is now possible for the first time. No single nation, no single people and no single region should inherit the future; all nations, all people, all regions should have the same opportunities. I hope that all people of talent and diligence, who earn the right, will inherit the future. I believe the future should belong to all who have the will and who are willing to put in the effort. Globalization, yes; but hegemonic uniformity and conformity, no. Material wealth enough for all to enjoy, yes; but the rule of money in all affairs and all corners of the world, no."

For such a "world century" to materialize, there is a need for a fundamental reorientation of our thinking, approaches and strategies — a paradigm shift that will draw on the best and most positive attributes of humanity. We sincerely believe that this initiative by the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is now being supported by this Assembly, is a major contribution to bringing about this shift.

Mr. Wenaweser (Liechtenstein): The initiative for a dialogue among civilizations, launched by the Islamic Republic of Iran, is in our view one of the most interesting and promising projects under consideration by the General Assembly. Liechtenstein has thus joined the sponsors of draft resolution A/54/L.60, which will be adopted later today.

The United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations is approaching, and a lot of work remains to be done if we are to fully explore the rich potential of the topic for the benefit of peoples and individuals worldwide, as well as for our daily work at the United Nations. We welcome the appointment of Mr. Giandomenico Picco as Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, as well as the contributions made by the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and many others. Liechtenstein has a strong interest in the future work on this issue, and in this debate we would like to offer just a few thoughts of a general nature.

Clearly, both conceptually and linguistically, the idea of a dialogue among civilizations was born out of a reaction to the famous theory of a "clash of civilizations", which was proposed as a new paradigm after the end of the cold war. It is meant to provide a counterbalance to a controversial and rather pessimistic view of the prevailing worldwide dynamics in world

affairs. There can be no doubt that the United Nations is the perfect forum to stage such a dialogue: the Charter of the United Nations starts with the words "We the peoples", and goes on to talk about practising tolerance and living in peace with one another. The creation of the United Nations itself was probably the most prominent result of a successful dialogue among nations and also, therefore, of civilizations. This Organization is thus the natural framework for establishing this dialogue.

As the provisional report of the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General observes, there is no agreed definition of the word "civilization". We would agree with his conclusion that embarking on a definitional debate within the United Nations could easily prove counterproductive, but it is certainly worth looking into some of the elements which constitute a civilization, if only to establish which notion the word "civilization" should not bear. We would like to make some comments on this question.

"Civilization" cannot mean a developmentally, morally, technologically or otherwise more "advanced" stage — more advanced, by necessity, in relation to other cultural entities. Such an understanding stems from obsolete concepts, but it is still encountered here and there. It would, of course, defeat the purpose and the foundation of a dialogue among civilizations right from the beginning.

It is important to recognize that, far from being a final product of a historic development, a civilization is constantly evolving, adapting and changing; it is a process, rather than a product. It is this very quality that ensures its survival and development. It is also this very quality which makes the proposed dialogue among civilizations such a necessity of logic and a potential source of inspiration for all civilizations. Speaking more concretely, and from our own perspective, there is such a thing as a Western civilization, and there was such a thing 100 years ago. While it would be hard to say which are the constituent elements of this, our civilization, it is quite safe to say that they are not identical to those of 100 years ago.

An indispensable element of fruitful and genuine dialogue among civilizations is the inclusion and active participation of a very wide range of actors who effectively and on a daily basis play a part in the issue at hand. Governments and their policies are mostly, and to varying degrees, expressions of civilizations, but they certainly do not represent them. The past few years have witnessed an enhanced involvement and an increased role of civil society in United Nations matters. In general, however, we continue to rely heavily on the routine of intergovernmental processes, which admittedly is necessary for many United Nations activities.

With regard to the proposed dialogue among civilizations, however, a true quantum leap will be necessary to allow the full exploration of its potential. The main activities with regard to the dialogue should take place outside of the intergovernmental framework, while we, as Governments, have the task of providing a forum for such a dialogue and of giving a voice to those with something to say.

"Dialogue" originally meant talking back and forth. Listening and talking are thus of equal importance -- or giving and taking, since language, written or spoken, is not the only means of communication and thus of dialogue. A dialogue consists of the willingness and ability to give and offer and of the open-mindedness to receive and integrate. This flow in both directions, this interaction, is perhaps the most significant characteristic of a dialogue.

The prerequisite for genuine dialogue is thus that the parties involved should regard one another with full respect and as being on the same level. Recognition of diversity must not establish a hierarchy, but should instead serve as a basis for the establishment of possible common ground, a common language.

There seems to be broad agreement on the existence of a relationship between globalization and a dialogue among civilizations, but less so on the nature of that relationship. Many have said that globalization facilitates such a dialogue; others have put more emphasis on the need for such a dialogue in the face of the perceived threat of globalization. As in all discussions on globalization, there is a clear technological dimension. Modern technology has intensified and promoted inter-cultural exchange largely unimpeded and at unprecedented speed. Nobody will contest the enormous inherent potential of these technologies for people worldwide, but scepticism and caution have also been expressed. The technologies in question are relatively recent, and their overall impact on the very nature and core of communication is not yet clear.

Globalization itself has already become a controversial concept and an emotionally charged term. Many of the fears and concerns expressed are very real and legitimate, and they need to be addressed. This, however, cannot be done through denial of the reality

that globalization exists, but rather through concerted and joint efforts to make it beneficial for the largest possible number of people worldwide.

The dialogue among civilizations could be a perfect vehicle for such efforts. The relationship between globalization and a dialogue among civilizations is a circular or mutually sustaining one. The technologies which are characteristic and indispensable elements of globalization can greatly facilitate the dialogue among civilizations, which in turn can contribute to shaping the forces of globalization in a culturally sound and sustainable manner.

The need for and usefulness of the proposed dialogue seem obvious, and there are clearly numerous promising ways of holding it. It is legitimate and important to ask what the goal of such a dialogue can or should be, as has been done by the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General and by others. Given the particular nature of such a dialogue and the great variety of participants in it, it seems important to keep an open and flexible mind on the question of a possible outcome, while setting out certain basic elements, in particular the importance of identifying, developing and strengthening common ground among civilizations. Promotion of tolerance and mutual understanding, enhanced readiness to learn from one another, and acceptance of differences: all these are elements of identifying new and consolidating existing common ground. From the United Nations perspective, it is most notably the Charter itself and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which constitute such common ground.

The importance of such common ground has been emphasized both by the Personal Representative and in the Teheran Declaration on Dialogue among Civilizations adopted by the Organization of the Islamic Conference. It is worth emphasizing too that the process of dialogue is a goal in itself, and that the quality of the dialogue taking place is the best yardstick for measuring its success and impact. Among the most famous dialogues in literature, after all, are the ones by Plato, in which Socrates and his interlocutors engage in attempts to define certain commonly used terms and invariably come to the conclusion that they seem not to understand the meaning of terms they use on a daily basis. The dialogue leading to that conclusion, however, constitutes such a learning process that both the participants and the reader feel enriched and inspired by the exchange, without having achieved what they originally set out to do.

The other obvious goal of a dialogue among civilizations is to prove that the predicted clash of civilizations is by no means a necessity and by no means inherent in the relationship among civilizations. This entails the prevention of conflicts, in particular armed conflicts, and is thus a very ambitious goal indeed which requires a pervasive culture of dialogue on all levels of our societies and within civilizations themselves.

The initiative before us gives us, as Governments, a unique opportunity to promote and facilitate such a dialogue, indeed to create the conditions under which it can take place.

Mr. Minoves-Triquell (Andorra) (*spoke in Spanish*): This may be the most appropriate forum in which to have a conversation and to share our views on what we mean when we say "dialogue among civilizations", simply because we talk to one another every day and have done so regularly in all the conference rooms of this Organization since its creation, and because in this Hall are gathered the representatives of most of the world's countries, who represent nations with many different cultures, histories, languages and traditions.

Let me begin by discussing the meaning of the word "dialogue". The various definitions agree that dialogue is the activity of transmitting thoughts and opinions, in writing or orally, to someone who is listening, understanding, reasoning and replying. All of these are important elements of a dialogue; without them, the dialogue would be imperfect or impossible. But the individual may be the most important element in ensuring that a dialogue is constructive. The individual can be a member of the same family, neighbourhood, city, region or country, or of a different nationality. And it is after all individuals who make up societies, nations and, ultimately, civilizations.

By "civilization", we mean an advanced level of intellectual, cultural and material development within a human society, featuring progress in the arts and sciences, the common use of writing and the emergence of complex political and social institutions. We distinguish and label as civilizations those which, because of their singularity, represent specific aspects of that society. Civilizations have appeared and disappeared throughout the years; they have been and are in continuous transformation, always leaving, when they have passed, vestiges of their existence. It is precisely

this that we are here today to speak about, to understand and, as far as possible, to evaluate.

(*spoke in French*)

The Principality of Andorra has always been a crossroads and melting pot for peoples. Many civilizations have encountered one another in the Pyrenees: Basques, Celts, Iberians, the tribes of Andosinos, Gauls, Romans, Arabs and Goths, and so many other people who have found refuge in our valley. This is nothing exceptional; this is the history of the world. Most of the cultures represented by our countries here today in the General Assembly are themselves an outcome of an historical dialogue between many cultures and civilizations. In my country, a haven of peace for seven hundred years, ideological enemies have coexisted in times of war. We understand the meaning of the word "dialogue", and we are convinced that this is the path of the future.

When different civilizations meet, with their heritage of different ideas and interests, conflicts arise. This is the basis of war. The United Nations must manage to become the forum where dialogue is possible as an alternative. This is where, aided by the principles of respect for human rights and freedom, which unites humankind, that common denominator can become the seed of understanding among peoples.

"Globalization" is in every mouth as this century ends. The representative of Liechtenstein just mentioned it. Globalization is indeed a fact at the economic and cultural level. We must rise to the challenge of protecting our cultural, linguistic and religious identities and various civilizations while promoting convergence on the basis of values common to all mankind, and I repeat, human rights and freedom. Whoever speaks of freedom speaks of democracy.

Andorra cares deeply about this, and often it has shown its desire for seeking linkages among civilizations. It is enough to quote the first paragraph of the preamble to the Statute of the International Criminal Court drafted by my country at the Rome conference:

(*spoke in English*)

> "The States Parties to this Statute, conscious that all peoples are united by common bonds, their cultures pieced together in a shared heritage, and concerned that this delicate mosaic may be shattered at any time".

When one speaks of civilizations, one should also remember that especially after this century of accrued globalization and unprecedented progress, different generations of people of the same civilization are sometimes at odds, since the values they cherish and the heritage they relate to might not be the same. I would like to invite my colleagues to give thought to this paradox in the framework of the 1995 Commitments of the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development, elaborated by my country, from which I quote:

> "We will ... acknowledge and encourage the contribution of people of all age groups as equally and vitally important for the building of a harmonious society, and foster dialogue between generations in all parts of society".

(*spoke in Spanish*)

The dialogue among us here in this Hall or elsewhere, in the same language or in different ones, should enable us to overcome differences of opinion that are obstacles to our progress. Any peaceful settlement of an international conflict must start by means of dialogue if it is to succeed. If there is no dialogue, preventive diplomacy will remain fruitless and, probably, wars will recur indefinitely.

On the threshold of a new millennium, let us give dialogue its full worth so that all of us together may advance on the path of progress and peace. For all these reasons, my country today wishes to co-sponsor draft resolution A/54/L.60 in introduced by Iran.

Mr. Moushoutas (Cyprus): Cyprus expresses deep appreciation and commends the delegation of Iran for having inscribed the item on dialogue among civilizations on the agenda of the General Assembly. Considering the state of world affairs, the historic juncture at which mankind finds itself and the fact that in recent years most conflicts used the threat of diversity as justification for conflict, the timing for consideration of this item could not have been more opportune.

A new millennium is dawning. We are on the threshold of a new set of a thousand years of what is expected to be unprecedented technological advance and interdependence, where every action and inaction and every human interchange will be more than ever globalized, instantly radiating its impact to the four corners of the Earth.

Our world, in a way, is getting smaller, and distances seem to be of no consequence. We are becoming a global village, a minuscule part of the infinite. As such, it would be expected that, like water running to water, we would draw closer together, man closer to his fellow man and nations closer to nations, accepting and appreciating our diversity and pluralism, the "harmony in difference" mentioned in UNESCO's Declaration of Principles on Tolerance.

Instead, we are witnessing an ominous anachronism, a contradiction, where separatism, division, partition and segregation are pursued and at times rewarded, instead of unity, integration and cooperation. These separatist trends, especially when militant, form the root causes of internal strife and can pose threats to regional and even international peace and security.

The provisional report on the subject by the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations stated that the majority of recent conflicts where United Nations peacekeeping operations take place are based on ethnic, tribal, or religious grounds. Mr. Giandomenico Picco, the wise and learned Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, stresses the need to promote an understanding in dealing with the root causes of conflicts, and he adds what I consider to be the gist of the subject matter:

> "Just as, during the 1990s, many who went to war used the threat of diversity as justification for conflict, perhaps in the future those who seek peace will use the spirit of dialogue among civilizations as a means to move forward." (A/54/546, annex, para. 14)

Promoting understanding, tolerance and cooperation through dialogue is not only an ideal policy, it is also the choice for survival. Since we have experienced so much destruction and human misery in the present millennium, common sense dictates that we should avoid the calamities and the horrors of wars that we have brought upon us in the past, and that peace and cooperation should replace confrontations and wars.

The Charter of the United Nations, the General Assembly resolution on the culture of tolerance and the Declaration on a Culture of Peace consider dialogue the *sine qua non* for harmonizing human relations. We consider, therefore, the initiative of the President of Islamic Republic of Iran, Seyed Mohammad Khatami, wise and visionary. It seeks to institutionalize dialogue among peoples of different cultures and civilizations, accepting and appreciating the diversity and the beauty of difference in culture.

There is a need to inform people of the benefits of cultural pluralism and of how civilizations can be enriched by one another. There is also a need to address concerns that portray specific religions and cultures as threats to peace and coexistence. Our survival ultimately will depend on our success at promoting dialogue as the accepted mode of behaviour for settling differences and disputes in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

My Government is committed to solving the problem of Cyprus through dialogue. As a matter of fact, such a dialogue is presently under way at United Nations Headquarters. This is an example of our adherence to the spirit of dialogue and to the Charter. We are striving for a peaceful solution, so that the two communities may again live in peace and harmony, as they have done for centuries in the past.

It is with these thoughts in mind that we have co-sponsored this year's draft resolution, A/54/L.60, and that we, along with other Member States, will participate in making the year 2001 the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

Mr. Al-Hajri (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am pleased to make this statement on behalf of the Arab Group, which my delegation is chairing this month, on the agenda item entitled "Dialogue among civilizations". Allow me to extend our sincere thanks to the Secretary-General for the report in A/54/546. This report includes an outline of how the Secretary-General intends to respond to the invitation from the General Assembly to reflect on the idea of "dialogue among civilizations".

The debate on this agenda item does not only focus on the importance of dialogue among civilizations — which was highlighted in numerous statements by delegations during the general debate of the current Assembly session — but also emphasizes the firm intention of the international community to enter the third millennium following the approach outlined in General Assembly resolution 53/22 of 4 November 1998, entitled the "United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations".

In the preambular paragraphs of that resolution the Assembly reaffirmed the purposes and principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations, *inter alia*, "promoting and encouraging universal respect for human

rights and fundamental freedoms for all". The resolution recognized the "diverse civilizational achievements of mankind, crystallizing cultural pluralism and creative human diversity", and by it the Assembly also reaffirmed that "civilizational achievements constitute the collective heritage of mankind".

The Arab States have followed with great interest the meetings held in 1998 and 1999 that yielded the following results: the Declaration of Athens, entitled "The heritage of ancient civilizations: Implications for the modern world", which is contained in A/54/60; and the Teheran Declaration on Dialogue among Civilizations, which was adopted by the Islamic Symposium on Dialogue among Civilizations and is contained in document A/54/116. In addition, the Arab States followed the panel discussions on dialogue among civilizations held at United Nations Headquarters in May and November 1999.

The member States of the League of Arab States would like to call attention to the Arab position vis-à-vis the dialogue among civilizations. This position contains the following provisions. First, Arab States believe in the dialogue among civilizations and reject the idea of the clash of civilizations. Secondly, the Arab-Islamic civilization played a pioneering role in enriching human culture, in particular through its accomplishments in the fields of arts and sciences, accomplishments that built bridges of creativity linking ancient civilization to the modern age and that brought humanity to the point where it could make its current achievements, which are its common heritage. Thirdly, the challenges posed by globalization in our time are mainly based on the tyranny of power, the failure to acknowledge others and the attempt to subjugate them, thus endangering national identity and the specific cultural characteristics of nations. Fourthly, in order to avoid these risks, the dialogue among civilizations must be based on a composite concept made up of equality, justice, diversity and peace. Fifthly, the dialogue among civilizations needs to be based on a culture of peace which is itself founded on justice and tolerance.

And sixthly, in order to achieve true dialogue, tolerance and peace, three tenets must be respected. The first is that just as peace must be established in all parts of the world, foreign occupation and hegemony must be terminated and the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of States must be respected, as should the principle of non-interference in States' internal affairs. There can be no tolerance alongside occupation and aggression. The second tenet is the imperative need to remove the obstacles that impede the realization of the right of peoples to self-determination. The third tenet is the inadmissibility of the use or threat of use of force, or of the acquisition of the territories of others by means of war.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the General Assembly that the Arabs' choice of peace as a strategic option is proof of their credibility in adopting dialogue among civilizations and the culture of peace as a slogan for their struggle to achieve a permanent, just, comprehensive and peaceful settlement of the situation of the Middle East, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy. I would also like to emphasize the important role of the United Nations in educating the peoples of the world about the dialogue among civilizations in conformity with the noble purposes and principles of the United Nation Charter.

Ms. Korpi (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union on agenda item 34, entitled "Dialogue among civilizations". The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, as well as the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries members of the European Economic Area (EEA), Iceland and Norway, align themselves with this statement.

Our present generation is experiencing an unprecedented growth of affordable information technology, which is bringing all cultural spheres around the world into daily contact with each other at all levels of society. The ongoing process of globalization entails an intensified intercultural interchange. The rapid growth of opportunities for communication presents a tremendous challenge to us to increase our ability to understand and make ourselves understood. All societies essentially continue to approach communication from their own cultural heritage, determined by such features as language, behavioural conventions, customs, cultural traditions, experiences and beliefs.

The existing ethical and legal ground that the world community shares as a whole is also ample. Against that background, an international dialogue can be an enriching experience and helps develop understanding of the values that are inherent in humanity and common to all civilizations. The United Nations itself has done a great deal to establish a culture of dialogue and the world

community has repeatedly demonstrated its commitment to a shared existing ethical foundation.

As we all know, there exists no accepted definition of what constitutes a civilization — a fact that is also mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General. The European Union voices caution towards a stereotyped and limiting concept what constitutes a civilization. Indeed, we propose to use a wide concept to accommodate the varying conditions under which people belonging to different cultures, beliefs, nations and indigenous peoples and ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities, as well as immigrant and refugee communities, meet in dialogue and interact. Dialogue among and within countries, nations, cultures and religions is, in its most diverse sense, an excellent way to promote pluralism, tolerance and the participation of civil society in processes of governance.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Humankind has, through the course of history, developed its ethical traditions convinced that humans are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. The United Nations, in the aftermath of the two catastrophic World Wars, built on that in a search for common moral and ethical values when it undertook, in a major effort of international dialogue, to codify universal legal norms corresponding to the universal rights deriving from the inherent dignity of the human person. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights grew out of a recognition of these values. It was a codification of the existing fundamental values of all peoples, as again confirmed in the Proclamation of Teheran, in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and again, one year ago, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration.

The Year 2001 has been designated the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. The European Union welcomes the fact that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has reacted positively to the request of the General Assembly that it make a major contribution to the preparations for the Year and that it has already started to take concrete initiatives in this regard. Further, the European Union notes with satisfaction the appointment of Mr. Giandomenico Picco as Personal Representative of the Secretary-General and looks forward to entering into a dialogue with him on these issues.

In the same spirit, the European Union welcomes the interest shown so far by Governments and international organizations in the preparations for the international Year. The European Union has contributed by providing its own views on the subject, including in response to a note by the Secretariat a few months ago. We note that the draft resolution which we will adopt today makes specific reference to the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which has also proven itself active on this subject. The intention of the European Union is, no doubt like that of many Member States and groups of States — whether mentioned or not in the draft resolution — to continue to take interest in the preparations for the Year and to contribute to its success.

In our view, the wide range of existing instruments adopted in the United Nations system concerning tolerance, human rights, cultural cooperation, science and education constitute a solid normative basis for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. We do not need new international instruments or long processes of intergovernmental negotiations. We need practical action to bring people together, including through the use of modern methods of communication.

The United Nations has, from its inception, provided a forum for dialogue primarily among Governments. While the European Union supports the further development of the intergovernmental dialogue in the United Nations system, we would be disappointed if the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations were also eventually to fall primarily into this genre. Governments have the responsibility to represent the public interests of their citizens, but can hardly be expected to represent, in any meaningful way in a civilizational dialogue, the whole diversity of views and values held by all communities resident under their jurisdiction.

In the past, thematic years proclaimed by the United Nations have inspired governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations to focus on the theme at hand and it is to be expected that a year of dialogue among civilizations will induce similar activity. The United Nations must find ways and means to be instrumental in promoting and stimulating an increased civilizational dialogue. As the United Nations remains a forum primarily for Governments, and while some activities could be foreseen at United Nations Headquarters in close interaction with civil society, the mainstream of activities should be with civil society and subsequently take place at the local level and in the context of appropriate institutional partnerships. The Governments have a role to play, inasmuch as the intergovernmental processes of dialogue among civilizations should provide an

opportunity for practical ways of facilitating interchange among ordinary people.

Within the European Union existing institutions already contribute to an ongoing informal dialogue at all levels. Education, whether formal or informal, can provide information and can cultivate an open attitude, thereby offering members of society insight into the lives and ideals of other nations and civilizations. Academic programmes support research in this field. Non-governmental organizations devoted to developments abroad are highly active in publicizing characteristics of civilizations. Exchange programmes and travelling opportunities enable people to acquire first hand experience. The European Union supports a variety of similar activities involving interchange among civil society extending beyond the European Union.

In this connection, the European Union recalls its interest in the upcoming World Conference against Racism and Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, to be held in the year 2001. The preparation for and follow-up to this Conference will be pursued within an international, regional and national framework. Non-governmental organizations will give their own distinct contribution at the World Conference, as well as throughout the whole preparatory and follow-up processes at all levels. The European preparations for the World Conference against Racism and Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance are being conducted by the Council of Europe. The process will culminate in the European conference under the title "All different, all equal: from principle to practice" in October 2000 in Strasbourg. The European Union is committed to participating actively.

In conclusion, for Europe, multi-ethnic and multicultural diversity and interaction have created an enormously rich heritage, but they have also generated conflicts. The countries which today form the European Union are aware, from their own experience, that the only way peace and stability can thrive is through democracy, pluralism and human rights in open and tolerant societies. Therefore, we are committed to promoting international cooperation, democracy, the rule of law and human rights in the global context as well.

Mr. Fruchtbaum (Solomon Islands): When the delegate of Solomon Islands spoke from this rostrum 13 months ago in support of the draft resolution introduced by Iran, designating the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, he posed a number of questions to suggest the intellectual and practical difficulties of the proposed undertaking. He asked: How are civilizations to be defined for the Year of Dialogue? What recognition is to be given to those cultures and civilizations that comprise larger ones? What, in fact, is the relationship between culture and civilization?

Although these questions are not answered in the thoughtful analysis of Giandomenico Picco, the Secretary-General's Personal Representative for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, in the annex to the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/546) now before us, we are thankful to Mr. Picco for taking on his difficult assignment. In his well-crafted text, he again demonstrates the courage for which he has been widely acclaimed.

> "While all of these questions may be justified and useful, the United Nations may not be the appropriate forum in which to examine them",

he writes, as if addressing the Solomon Islands delegate. He continues:

> "Indeed, such discussions can open the door to political and cultural misunderstandings that could ultimately lead in the opposite direction from that which the General Assembly membership surely had in mind when it unanimously adopted resolution 53/22."

He calls for the pursuit of a different approach, for:

> "The last 10 years have proven that what is needed is a dialogue which can be both preventive — when possible — and inclusive in nature".

Rejecting the idea offered by some that recent and current conflicts represent a clash of civilizations, cultures or religions, Mr. Picco contrasts the perception that "diversity poses a threat" with "the acceptance of the enormous value of diversity and the fact that diversity is the beginning of growth", concepts he places at the core of the United Nations. He sees this discussion as providing "an opportunity to rediscover the fundamental values on which our Organization was solidly founded." He writes that

> "The establishment of the United Nations was intended to provide a paradigm of international relations based on inclusion rather than exclusion."

Whether that was actually the intent and how well it was fulfilled throughout the history of the Organization need not be debated here. We can accept the general spirit of Mr. Picco's observation.

Where he goes next, however, raises for my delegation vexing questions. He writes:

> "It seems appropriate, therefore, to speak, within the United Nations context, of two sets of civilizations: those that perceive diversity as a threat and those that perceive diversity as an integral component of growth. The dialogue should be between these two civilizations or set of civilizations".

My delegation asks, who will place his or her country or culture or civilization in the group that sees diversity as a threat? In the United Nations, will not speaking about two civilizations, in Mr. Picco's words, "open the door to political and cultural misunderstandings"?

Do we really have a set of two civilizations, or rather a spectrum of values and interpretations? Even where diversity is seen as an integral component of growth, is there a limit to how much diversity a culture or civilization, or for that matter, a nation can live with successfully? How is that limit determined, and by whom? Is there any role for the international community in the determination, and if so, what should it be? Are we overlooking the value of other cultures' values, including those of indigenous peoples? Recent and current events painfully demonstrate that these are not questions to be dismissed as invitations to engage in academic acrobatics.

Mr. Picco points out that dialogue was invented long ago and it exists "even where war rages and conflict has created seemingly insurmountable borders between people". We agree and, with him, believe that we need to identify and listen to "those indomitable human beings who have been able to see through the alleged diversity of their neighbours and keep alive the flame of humanity". For, as Mr. Picco writes, their example "is surely the most effective means of teaching and preaching dialogue".

In many ways, as he shows, the Member States have taken steps to foster dialogue, recently for example, through the United Nations Year for Tolerance and the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance, as well as the International Year for the Culture of Peace and the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World.

Much of the diplomatic work we do here, in fact, involves dialogue with people from other civilizations, cultures, religions, ethnic groups and, of course, nations. It is true, as Mr. Picco writes, that "The membership of the United Nations shares a set of common values, as reflected in the Charter." One may add to this the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a long list of international conventions. The question is how these values are interpreted and used.

> "The expansion of that common denominator of values would, by definition, facilitate dialogue, as Member States would share more and more common principles",

writes Mr. Picco. That "common denominator of values", however, needs to be delineated. But will a consensus on what it is be possible in the near future? All of us can testify from our experience in various committees and working groups here how frustratingly difficult, and at times impossible, it is to reach agreement on some things where even the smallest expansion of values is required or implied. Mr. Picco observes that "Some may fear that such an expansion could lead to the domination of the strong", but

> "In this regard, the United Nations can play a significant role by seeking to ensure that, in the process of expansion, identities are preserved."

How is the United Nations to do this successfully in an era when so much is in flux, when cultures and nations are facing powerful forces for change, and dialogue is being sought — even demanded?

The analysis by Mr. Picco ends with his insight that "Human history continuously develops by carrying out two apparently contradictory trends: integration and local identities". Both trends, he notes, "have appeared hand in hand in many parts of the world during the last 30 years".

From this evidence, Mr. Picco concludes that "the expansion of common values and the strengthening of identities are not contradictory". He says

> "The message of diversity, as it relates to the United Nations system, can serve as a tool to protect distinct identities, as the common denominator of values which bring us all together expands."

Moreover, he goes on,

> "The greater the appreciation of diversity, the deeper the sense of identity and the sounder the enlargement of the common denominator of values. These developments will, in turn, strengthen the United Nations system."

The Solomon Islands delegation asks how these developments are to be fostered, especially in view of the fact that the Secretary-General introduces Mr. Picco's analysis by noting the breadth of the concept of dialogue among civilizations, the lack of financial resources and the need for funding from outside the United Nations to support sharply focused projects that may be proposed.

Certainly, the work of Mr. Picco on behalf of the Secretary-General and the future efforts of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other bodies are welcome. Regional and national conferences and symposia, such as the two recently held here, are valuable, and we have benefited from the efforts of Iran. Nevertheless, as the Solomon Islands delegate said last year, the dialogue among civilizations raises sensitive questions that call for serious and constructive dialogues rather than unanswered monologues. How these matters are to be addressed, he said, "cannot be left for resolution to the Secretariat or a specialized agency". (*A/53/PV.53, p. 12*)

Moreover, if the dialogue among civilizations is to have any long-term success, it must not be confined to elites to the exclusion of the widest representation of civil society, and that means public information efforts towards the early involvement of the print and electronic media.

Obviously, the planning is under way. It should be open to all of us here in New York, where even the smallest delegations have the opportunity to make useful intellectual contributions.

Mr. Lee See-Young (Republic of Korea): At the outset, I would like to express my delegation's appreciation to Ambassador Hadi Nejad Hosseinian of Iran for introducing draft resolution A/54/L.60 this morning, which we support wholeheartedly. I also congratulate him for taking the initiative of organizing the second panel discussion, on 22 November 1999, on the subject of "Dialogue among civilizations", which drew considerable attention from both diplomatic and academic corners. I would also like to commend Mr. Giandomenico Picco, Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, for his well-conceived provisional report, annexed to the Secretary-General's report.

At the dawn of the new millennium, we consider it both timely and appropriate that the international community involve itself in a series of serious dialogues among civilizations here, under the aegis of the United Nations. The United Nations was created as a bulwark against history's deplorable pattern of pitting nation against nation and people against people. In the aftermath of the Second World War, which wracked the world and brought about unfathomable tragedy, the United Nations advanced a world vision where peace, rather than conflict, would prevail over all civilizations on the globe.

Unfortunately, as we look back over the second half of the twentieth century, we cannot but acknowledge that conflicts have never ceased to riddle relations among nations. Moreover, the United Nations in the post-Second World War era has often been called upon to get involved in conflicts resulting from ethnic, religious and cultural tensions that have led far too often to human tragedies. In order to avoid future tragedies, such as those witnessed from the Balkans to the Great Lakes region of Africa, we must address the root causes of these conflicts through the promotion of dialogue among diverse civilizations.

Hence, at this crucial juncture in history, Member States of the United Nations are called upon to garner their political will to create a more fertile environment for dialogue among civilizations. Far too often, we have seen that mere misunderstandings among neighbours, either at the national or international level, can become the very seeds of hostility. If allowed to grow, discord and animosity will surely choke our carefully cultivated peace. This situation is simply not tolerable.

The international community has an obligation to ensure that the much-publicized theme of the "clash of civilizations" does not turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy. In fact, rich diversity among the world's civilizations can and should be a rallying cry for global harmony and prosperity, rather than for clash and conflict. As history has shown, great civilizations have always flourished by sharing their ideas and experiences with other civilizations.

Moreover, in this age of globalization, it is increasingly evident that contact among different peoples from different civilizations and cultures will intensify as

information and communication technologies continue to develop and link us closer together than ever before. Under these circumstances, the international community must be able to provide the normative architecture that will channel this social entropy towards harmony, understanding and peaceful coexistence.

Although an acceptance of diversity and a spirit of tolerance are essential ingredients in the dialogue among civilizations, we cannot deny the existence of universal values which generations all over the world have aspired to and struggled for throughout their respective histories. These universal values are the embodiment of collective wisdom, insights and experiences emanating from different civilizations. They provide rich soil in which the seeds of diversity among civilizations can together be planted and encouraged to flourish.

The United Nations has served for the past half century as a host to all nations and has promoted reconciliation and dialogue among all the peoples of the world. The United Nations is therefore the most appropriate forum to address the issue of dialogue among civilizations. We warmly welcome the designation of the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace, and the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. It is also fitting that these two designated years will usher in the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World.

Having inherited consecutively Buddhist and Confucian civilizations in the past, and more recently some elements of Christian and Muslim culture, the Korean people are considered to be well equipped to engage in a dialogue among civilizations conducted in the context of the United Nations. On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Korea, I would like to assure the Assembly that we will make important contributions to the process of consultations and preparation culminating in a successful United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations in the year 2001 and beyond.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First I should like to take note of the very relevant and timely nature of the item on dialogue among civilizations. It is symbolic that this item was proposed by Iran, which, as is well known, is one of the most ancient States of Asia, having inherited cultural diversity from its great civilizations.

The concept of dialogue among civilizations is consonant with the initiative taken by the President of Russia, Boris Yeltsin in June this year, which is jointly to elaborate the concept of the world for the twenty-first century. We are convinced that a world in which each State is entitled to its rightful place among other nations and to equal security is the bedrock for interaction among different civilizations. A multipolar world, and the transition to it which is dictated by the objective realities of our time, is to us a model which shapes, and is a buffer to, the coexistence of different cultural systems.

We believe that dialogue among civilizations in the context of a multipolar world means that the principles of pluralism and democratization of international life must be strengthened. In practice, this means rejecting attempts to monopolize the inter-State sphere, and the non-use of force and other coercive measures in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and in circumvention of the Security Council.

At the same time, we believe that dialogue within civilizations, by guaranteeing human rights and democratic freedoms and by developing civil society, can stabilize the multipolar world both from the inside and along the contiguous perimeters of its various poles.

Clearly, the establishment of a dialogue among civilizations is urgently required and will enhance the United Nations potential and consolidate its role as a universal mechanism for developing a multilateral cooperation. The United Nations Charter, which from the beginning was a synthesis of interests of various value systems, is the political and legal core of creative interaction among civilizations as we move to a multipolar model of the world.

Today, the words of the Charter which call upon all peoples "to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours" have not only lost none of their moral force, but have become a concrete imperative of history addressed to humankind on the threshold of the twenty-first century.

We read with great interest the provisional report of the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, Giandomenico Picco. We agree with his conclusions that dialogue among civilizations must be all-encompassing, based on the recognition of human rights and cultural pluralism.

At the same time, less obvious to us is the idea that in the context of the United Nations it is appropriate to talk about two types of civilizations: those that perceive diversity as a threat and those that perceive it as an integral component of growth. It is hardly appropriate to create such a line of demarcation; rather, dialogue should be built on the combined efforts of all States and peoples in combating violence, extremism, terrorism, poverty, famine and disease, that is, all those disasters which deny the very essence, the basis, of any civilization.

It was precisely on that understanding that the Russian delegation joined the sponsors of the draft resolution entitled "United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations" whose adoption, we affirm, is the desire of the world community to move towards a world order based on the primacy of law and on universal values, not on the arbitrary excommunication from civilization of whole States and peoples.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in thus morning's debate on agenda item 34.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.

United Nations A/54/PV.78

General Assembly

Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

78th plenary meeting
Friday, 10 December 1999, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Jusys (Lithuania), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

Agenda item 34 *(continued)*

Dialogue among civilizations

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/546)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.60)

Mr. Widodo (Indonesia): It is indeed a pleasure for me to speak on behalf of the Indonesian delegation on agenda item 34 on "Dialogue among Civilizations". Let me begin by expressing our deepest congratulations to the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran for its timely initiative on this subject and for the considerable efforts that have been made to begin the dialogue. We believe that it is timely not only because of the significance of a new millennium and the beginning a new era of greater awareness and understanding, but also because of the backdrop of violence which rages throughout the world as we close this chapter of our history. It is also auspicious that we are undertaking our deliberations today, which is Human Rights Day.

Throughout time, mankind has only benefited from increased communication and an improved knowledge of concepts and practices that are initially perceived to be foreign or different. For through that process of inquiry, study and exchange of ideas, real and lasting change has been made and peace has been achieved. We are today uniquely positioned to expand the dialogue to one among civilizations spread across the globe. The information technology that is available and the advances in communication and in travel not only facilitate such a dialogue among civilizations but make it an imperative. Globalization will become a positive and welcome process when peoples and civilizations meet in dialogue and not in conflict.

The end of the cold war shattered the old paradigm of international relations. With the end of the decades-long struggle between East and West, there were some who held that new alliances needed to be formed to protect the gains that had been made and to preserve traditional values and cultural heritages from potential new threats. It was predicted that the East-West contest would be replaced by one between North and South, between privileged and impoverished, with a religious and racial dimension superimposed. A clash among civilizations needed to be averted, and like-minded countries banded together in new alliances.

At a more local level, this could be seen as sheer bigotry and ignorance. At the international level, it is an injustice to humanity and stifles the very progress we all pursue. It closes the door on enlightenment and hobbles any hope of achieving global tolerance and common values. A dialogue among civilizations is essential if we are to achieve our long-sought goals of ending racism and racial discrimination and of advancing human rights

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through cooperation and understanding. I would recall that Iran's promotion of a dialogue among civilizations was based on the premise that the diversity of humankind was a source of strength and not a cause for division. Rather than closing doors and defending against a phantom enemy, the dialogue is inclusive and allows all to contribute to a global culture.

In that regard, in my own country of Indonesia our national motto is *Bhineka Tunggal Ika*, which means "unity in diversity". It is from the hundreds of different ethnic groups that compose the nation of Indonesia that we draw our strength. As our people profess the world's major religions, come from diverse backgrounds with distinct languages and hold dear their varied heritage, we look to a future of prosperity that will be possible only as a consequence of tolerance and respect.

It is from our experience at the national level, and with a sincere recognition of the important need to create such a climate at the international level, that Indonesia supports the notion of a dialogue among civilizations and is therefore a sponsor of draft resolution A/54/L.60.

In the same vein, Indonesia welcomes the substantive activities being undertaken by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and others to promote dialogue and to facilitate an exchange of views among policy makers and within society. My delegation commends the proposal by the OIC to prepare a draft universal declaration of dialogue among civilizations and a 10-year programme of action. Likewise, the proclamation by resolution 52/15 of the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace should complement the goals of the dialogue.

The success of a dialogue among civilizations would validate the principles and goals of the United Nations Charter and would greatly strengthen the deliberations undertaken in this forum. It would enable us to move forward in such areas as human rights, social development and on environmental and numerous other issues. Indonesia therefore strongly supports a dialogue and looks forward to its successful undertaking.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): The creation of the United Nations, following the upheaval of two World Wars, was guided by a spirit of tolerance, concord and solidarity, with the goal of building a world free of hatred and enmity. That altruistic spirit made possible what was then called peaceful coexistence, which is nothing more than a dialogue between two worlds that differ in every way, beginning with their ideology and political systems.

This experience of universal coexistence is a clear example of the symbiosis that can bring together people from all races, languages and cultures.

In its mission to safeguard international peace, the United Nations must therefore make dialogue among civilizations its principal weapon, because only such a dialogue will be able to overcome the numerous conflicts, confrontations and antagonisms among people. It is therefore no surprise that the General Assembly proclaimed the year 2000 the International Year for the Culture of Peace and 2001 the International Year for Dialogue among Civilizations. This is, in fact, a symbolic reminder that peace and dialogue are closely linked and work in unison in the search for a universal civilization.

In assuming the chairmanship of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) group at the United Nations, my country cannot remain silent on the subject of the important Tehran Declaration on the Dialogue among Civilizations, adopted in May 1999, or the resolution on dialogue among contemporary civilizations, which resulted from the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the countries of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in Ouagadougou. Furthermore, various speakers have recalled the crucial role played by President Mohammad Khatami of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the current Chairman of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, in taking the decision to proclaim the United Nations International Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. We are convinced that in this area, cooperation between the OIC, the United Nations and other international organizations will ensure the success of this exceptional world event.

That is why my delegation would like most sincerely to commend the Secretary-General for his efforts, and in particular for appointing a Personal Representative to deal with the issue and to work in close cooperation with Governments and certain regional groups in the implementation of the initiative. The provisional report submitted to us in this regard reflects the seriousness of his approach and the determination with which he intends to carry out his mission. That is also why we ask the Assembly to support massively, by consensus, draft resolution A/54/L.60, which is now before it. This enormous enterprise naturally requires all States to participate, because it is a collective endeavour to give

our world a more human face. Governments, organizations, institutions, researchers, politicians, religious leaders and others are all invited to carry out appropriate educational, social and cultural programmes so as to promote dialogue among peoples and civilization.

We are not far from an event that will surely be one of the greatest examples of dialogue between cultures and religions: Bethlehem 2000. As I have already said, celebrating the birth of Christ in the land of Islam is a proof of tolerance and an unprecedented example of brotherhood, for which credit must go to the cooperation between the Palestinian Authority, the Holy See and Italy.

May that concrete action, based on a spirit of friendship, agreement and perfect understanding, inspire and guide the international community so that we can truly make 2001 the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

Mr. Sadasivan (Singapore): First, let me say that I am delivering this statement on behalf of my Ambassador, Mr. Kishore Mahbubani.

We would like to congratulate the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for launching this timely initiative. This year, Singapore has decided to sponsor the draft resolution; we will therefore be speaking in support of it. In our statement today, we will essentially make three points. First, we hope to explain why this is an idea whose time has come. Secondly, we would like to spell out some conditions that have to be met for a successful dialogue. Thirdly, we would like to discuss some of the inevitable difficulties.

For each of these three points, we will also make three sub-points. On the first key point, we believe that this idea is timely for several reasons. First, it is an undeniable reality that we live in world where distances are shrinking; the world has never been smaller. Distant civilizations have become close neighbours. In the past, to use a metaphor, civilizations travelled in different boats and in different oceans. Today, we all share the same boat; now we have fundamental common interests. However, our common interests overlay diverse historical and cultural backgrounds. No boat can survive long if its passengers do not get along with each other. This is one key reason why we need a dialogue among civilizations. Even though we are now physically in one boat, mentally we still belong to different worlds.

Secondly, not only has the world shrunk, but our lives have become intertwined and interdependent. The interdependence in the economic sphere is now well accepted. We need only look at how the Asian financial crisis started in South-East Asia and rippled across the world. But this interdependence also applies to other areas. We now share one global environment, especially in respect of crucial necessities like air and water. Nuclear clouds do not respect borders: neither do diseases. At the same time, on the cultural front, mass communications and telecommunications, as well as the Internet, have created a close interaction between distant cultures on a scale never before seen in human history. That is another reason for dialogue.

The third reason is perhaps the most obvious. For the first time in history, several major civilizations are likely to flourish at the same time. This is a new phenomenon, especially if one looks at the history of the previous two millenniums. When some Asian societies were flourishing 1,000 years ago, European societies were languishing. When European civilizations achieved new heights of creativity in science, technology and culture in the past few centuries, Asian societies were left languishing. In the next few centuries, diverse civilizations will be flourishing at the same time. Samuel Huntington feels that this could lead to a clash of civilizations. We believe that that could be prevented with a dialogue among civilizations.

Our second key point is that for any such dialogue to succeed, we have to meet certain conditions. The first condition is that there should be a tolerance of diversity. In learned minds, this seems like the repetition of a cliché. But if we turn on our CNN and BBC World Service television programmes every day and observe daily scenes of conflict created by differences of race, language, religion and culture, we can see that achieving tolerance of diversity will not be easy.

In a small way, Singapore has tried to promote tolerance by encouraging respect for all religions and cultures. With a small population of three million, we have four official languages. At State ceremonies to which religious representatives are invited, we have several representatives. We believe that respect for multiracialism is an essential condition for Singapore's long-term survival. We believe that it is also essential for global survival.

Secondly, there should be tolerance of change. For most of history, most of mankind has lived in certain set patterns. Most of us grew up in monocultural universes where the traditions of children were similar to the

traditions of their grandparents. The clock of history has now gone into fast forward. Our children will never experience the environment of our grandparents. They will have to learn to adapt their traditions and cultures to meet new global trends and norms. The General Assembly, for example, regularly comes out with new norms concerning the treatment of children, women and minorities. All these new norms will have to be meshed with old norms. This requires tolerance of change.

Thirdly, we will need tolerance of learning. The very concept of tolerance of learning may seem bizarre. Some may say that surely learning requires tolerance and not the other way around. But this statement is not made in the abstract. It reflects the realities of today. In the past few centuries, the most successful societies have been found in two corners of the globe, North America and Western Europe. They have generously shared their advances in civilization and their learning with the rest of the world. But in doing so, they have also come to believe that global learning is a one-way street. They teach and the rest of the world learns. As other societies and civilizations flourish, learning will have to become a two-way street. All societies may have something to learn from one another. For example, the developed societies have done well by developing a language of rights. Several developing societies have survived centuries by emphasizing the language of responsibilities. Developed and developing societies can learn from one another by balancing the language of rights with the language of responsibilities. This requires tolerance of learning.

On that third key point, we believe that dialogue is never easy, even between individuals. Inevitably, there will be difficulties. In the field of dialogue among civilizations, we see at least three difficulties: conceptual, representational and political.

First, on the conceptual front, the first question that needs to be asked is: Where does one civilization end and the other begin? The history of mankind teaches us that civilizations are not clean entities, like billiard balls. Most civilizations have become intermeshed with one another in one way or another. Clearly, it will be difficult to disentangle one civilization from another. But we also know from our common life experience that there are different cultural universes. The habits of life and respect for traditions vary enormously around the globe. We can see different civilizations even if we have difficulty defining their borders clearly. Some of the conceptual difficulties have also been mentioned in the annex to the Secretary-General's report.

The second problem will be representational. Civilizations, unlike nation-States, have no organized structures. It was relatively easy for the world to create a League of Nations or a United Nations. It will be difficult, if not impossible, to create a "League of Civilizations" or a "United Civilizations". Selecting or electing representatives of civilizations for this dialogue will be a delicate and difficult task.

The third difficulty will be political. Dialogue occurs best in a meeting among equals. But civilizations, like every other form of social organization, have never been equal. There are disparities of power. To overcome these disparities, the powerful will have to learn to speak humbly and the humble will have to learn to speak confidently.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that we welcome this initiative, despite the difficulties we have raised. We are pleased that the Secretary-General has come out with a timely and useful report. We congratulate him on the appointment of Mr. Giandomenico Picco as his Personal Representative for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. My delegation looks forward to working closely with Mr. Picco.

Mr. Belfort (Haiti) (*spoke in French*): I am pleased to address the Assembly on behalf of the Haitian delegation to express my country's support for draft resolution A/54/L.60 on dialogue among civilizations. That topic is of the greatest interest to my country at the highest level, especially since Port-au-Prince, Haiti, was the site from 3 to 5 December 1999 of the eleventh Regional Forum of Ministers of Culture and Officers in charge of Cultural Policies in Latin America and the Caribbean, which concluded with a declaration recognizing that culture is the basis for interaction among groups of human beings with a view to changing the world.

The item "Dialogue among civilizations" is most timely, since for some time the idea of a clash of civilizations has been a source of growing anxiety among people. In that connection, the Haitian delegation is grateful to those who have worked to make dialogue among civilizations a major concern on the United Nations agenda. This is reflected in the round-tables organized to provide essential information for creating the framework of norms that will make it possible to understand not only what makes us different from one another but what connects us.

We cannot speak constructively of dialogue among civilizations without mentioning globalization, which, like it or not, continues deeply to transform the structures of international society in the direction of uniformity. In the post-cold-war world, the economic, technological and military supremacy of one side tends to be reflected in an increasing trend towards unilateralism, which gives rise to self-absorbed, intolerant and sometimes even violent reactions. This cannot fail to be of concern, and it is entirely legitimate for us to do all we can to ensure that globalization respects the diversity of human societies. It is important therefore to humanize this process by ensuring that it is neither sanctified nor demonized and that innovation serves diversity and not standardization, integration and not exclusion. The most important thing is to protect the human identity that is our greatest treasure.

Apart from the concerns it arouses, one of the positive elements of globalization, as stressed by Professor Richard Falk at the second round-table on dialogue among civilizations, lies in the understanding that the world is made up not only of sovereign States but also of normative communities with ancient traditions. Through tricks of history, globalization can lead to an ever more complex interaction among tradition, modernity and post-modernity. That is how we should certainly view this dialogue among civilizations, especially since we know that beyond making things more uniform and global, the triumph of globalization means an end to these "great narratives" that destroy differences, and it also means the possible emergence of true, constructive cultural pluralism fueled by dialogue among civilizations.

The Haitian delegation has taken note of the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/546), and thanks Mr. Kofi Annan and his Personal Representative for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, Mr. Giandomenico Picco, for the clarity of the information and the aptness of the views contained in that document. We note with interest the comment that

> "It seems appropriate ... to speak, within the United Nations context, of two sets of civilizations: those that perceive diversity as a threat and those that perceive diversity as an integral component of growth. The dialogue should be between these two civilizations or set of civilizations". (*A/54/546, para. 4*)

That approach goes to the heart of the problems of our time. In our quest for modernity, should we lose all diversity that runs counter to the process of globalization, or should we integrate and give prominence to that diversity, in a spirit of post-modern acceptance, with a view to protecting the diversity that is at the very heart of the identity of human societies?

The Haitian delegation has also noted how well the report in document A/54/546 highlights the actions taken by our Organization to achieve the culture of peace and tolerance that we all desire. Without any doubt, one must believe that dialogue among civilizations will contribute fundamentally to the achievement of this goal by creating an arena in which we can attack the deep-rooted causes of conflict. The Haitian delegation has also noted the reservations expressed in that report on the validity of the United Nations framework for finding answers to certain conceptual questions. It must be pointed out, however, that there is no more appropriate framework than this, our common home, for finding essential responses to these questions, and on this subject we recommend greater interaction and permanent dialogue between the representatives of the various civilizational groups represented here. Buttressed, then, by our conviction that the Secretary-General and his Personal Representative will be able to find the ways and means to effectively implement the programme set out in document A/54/546, the Haitian delegation renews its support for draft resolution A/54/L.60, on dialogue among civilizations. We invite the Assembly to adopt it unanimously.

Mr. Lancry (Israel) (*spoke in French*): Israel will join the consensus on the draft resolution on the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. I take this opportunity on behalf of my Government to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation for the report of Mr. Giandomenico Picco, Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

Through its pilgrimages from nation to nation and its trials in many times and places, which have forged its history and civilization, the people of Israel have developed a pluralistic, fertile and enriching relationship with the various cultures of mankind. The confluence of the biblical message and its three major monotheistic branches — Judaism, Christianity and Islam — forms one of the most important, common bodies of universal culture. The ancient Persia of Cyrus and Darius, the ancient Egypt of Pharaoh and Joseph, Greek and Latin wisdom and philosophy and the Judeo-Muslim golden age in medieval Spain provided for the people of Israel intellectual horizons and a forum for dialogue in respect for diversity and the harmony of convergence.

The notion of dialogue, perceived in its current and rather narrow sense as a discussion between two, should be revised in the present circumstances at its etymological root to mean a discussion among several, as a tendency and aspiration towards *logos*, that logic leading to a synthesis that reconciles differences and reflects the values of harmony and tolerance.

In our region, the children of Abraham — Muslims, Christians and Jews — all contribute to the establishment of peace and reconciliation. Dialogue between the partners for peace, however, is still limited essentially to political issues. It is therefore both necessary and urgent to give this political grammar, often harsh and frustrating, an intercultural and intercivilizational basis in order to establish a new space in which diversity and unity will weave together the strata of human coexistence in justice, tolerance, solidarity and mutual respect.

We share fully and deeply the belief that dialogue among civilizations represents a fundamental element and a driving force in understanding among people and the firm establishment of peace and reconciliation. Israel is aiming towards this supreme objective in its work for peace. For my country, it is a matter of extending political peace into a regional reality that fully embraces all the peoples concerned in a symbiosis of the cultural, the spiritual, the political and the economic spheres. The Jewish people, both in its ancestral heritage and in its modern reincarnation, the State of Israel, is entirely open to this dialogue among civilizations and is committed to contribute to it in the firm hope that the family of nations will unreservedly and unequivocally join in.

Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Our debate on the dialogue among civilizations is taking place on the eve of a new millennium. When we speak of civilizations, we must speak of the various cultures that are the primary source that enriches civilizations. Culture, in one of its principal definitions, is the intellectual, behavioral, creative and scientific activity of man everywhere in the world. In other words, it is the largest star of a major galaxy around which all smaller stars revolve. Moreover, culture is the source of civilization, and civilization is the source of science. In our times, science is an embodiment of revolutionary discoveries in the fields of technology, electronics, informatics, communications, etc. — discoveries that have turned our planet into a small village.

Dialogue among civilizations and cultures is of exceptional importance because it opens the door wide for all countries of the world to exchange ideas, thus helping them improve and advance.

In the context of the dialogue among civilizations, we must mention the fact that the Arab world — and particularly my country, Syria — was the cradle of ancient civilizations and of the three divine religions. The peoples of ancient Syria played an important role by laying the original foundations on which many succeeding civilizations were built. In this connection, Hafez Al-Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic, said that the original, human civilizations arose, developed and flourished along the banks of major rivers, especially the Euphrates, which was the cradle of many great civilizations that witnessed the first steps taken by humanity in many fields — such as mining, the utilization of machines, transportation and writing. The outcome of the interaction of such civilizations and of their contact with the other civilization in the Nile basin was truly grand and helped other peoples bear the torch of civilization. The results of this interaction spread to other civilizations. On the banks of the Euphrates and the Nile people left important marks on human civilization, and their intellectual and material efforts have inspired the development and prosperity of later civilizations.

On this basis, we can say that ancient Syrian civilizations have given others the first elements of their civilizations in areas such as agriculture, manufacturing, engineering, science, architecture, the arts, law, literature and beliefs. King Hammurabi of Amoriya established the most advanced code of laws of ancient times. This code took a precise and comprehensive legal approach to social issues in all areas of life. King Hammurabi collected all the laws in effect in eastern Syria and improved them. He ordered that they be engraved on diorite stone tablets, which were then placed in town centres. He also developed laws to ensure that justice would reign like the sun over the world and would help defeat evil and darkness, so that the powerful would not oppress the weak.

Aristotle paid tribute to the laws of Carthage, laws that the people of Syria took up and improved on. Aristotle considered these the most precise and best-defined laws. They were recorded with precision in the Aramaic language, which then became the everyday language of all the citizens of Syria for the next 15 centuries.

Cuneiform writing was invented at the beginning of history. It was a complete writing system that gave

evidence of the long and continuous progress of human civilization. It also showed how societies in this region had made tremendous progress towards becoming greater and more modern civilizations.

Theodore the Sicilian asserted that the Syrians had discovered the alphabet, which was then taken up by the peoples of Canaan, who brought it to the Greeks. Sabatino Moscati asserted that the Phoenicians created the letters of the alphabet, and that one of the major achievements of the Phoenicians — perhaps the greatest of all their achievements — was the dissemination of the alphabet throughout the countries of the Mediterranean basin. The invention of the alphabet in the fifteenth century B.C. occurred in the Syrian town of Ugarit, and this was also where the alphabet was simplified from 30 to 22 letters. This civilizational invention radiated from Syria to all nations of the Mediterranean basin.

Moreover, the ancient Egyptians left mples, palaces and a great deal of art that fills us with awe and amazement at the region's ancient architectural grandeur. Visiting the ruins, we are impressed by the beauty and accuracy of the sculptures and the importance of the tablets those peoples left to us.

The Aramaic language of ancient Syria was the language of Jesus Christ. Aramaic and all the other ancient Semitic languages continued to develop until Arabic, the language of the Holy Koran, appeared, and it continues to be used by millions upon millions of people throughout the world.

These are only some of many examples that could be cited regarding the role played by Arab and Islamic civilizations. The examples show how these various civilizations interacted and how they continued to prosper. These are real, historical facts on whose foundation the dialogue among civilizations must be established.

Civilization is part and parcel of humanity's cultural heritage and serves as a bulwark against all forms of ignorance, backwardness and oppression. New civilizations cannot remain silent in the face of the disasters of famine, poverty and displacement. Nor can they remain silent in the face of aggression, occupation, oppression or injustice, nor in the face of the exploitation of the wealth of peoples — especially since these scourges pose a major danger to the international community, threatening to destabilize international relations at a time when the world needs cooperation and solidarity so as to bridge the ever-widening gap between the wealthy and powerful societies and those of the poor, developing countries.

The Meeting of Ministers of Culture of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries was held in the city of Medellín, Colombia, on 4 and 5 September 1997. At that Meeting, the then Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia, Ms. María Emma Mejía, stated that the cultural identity of each State is an invaluable heritage that we must preserve for future generations and for humanity as a whole, just as it was preserved for us by our ancestors. This preservation work needs to be done in order to ensure that these cultures can be enjoyed by all and be of service to all.

In this connection, allow me to note that the Meeting of Ministers of Culture of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries adopted the Medellín Declaration for Cultural Diversity and Tolerance. The Meeting also adopted the Plan of Action on Cultural Cooperation, which asserted that cultural diversity is a source of strength for humanity and contributes to the establishment of a new world order. The wealth of this cultural diversity must be viewed as an opportunity for cooperation and solidarity rather than as a source of conflict.

The Meeting also condemned all attempts to diminish the value of the cultural heritage of peoples under occupation, and it stressed the need to respect cultural values, traditions and customs, as well as to protect the architectural, religious and historical sites of such peoples.

The Conference also emphasized the responsibility of States to ensure and permit the exercise of the right to culture in accordance with article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The ministers emphasized the need to protect and safeguard the cultural diversity of mankind in all its manifestations so that this heritage would enrich future generations.

Some may claim that the clash of civilizations is inevitable, as certain writers and intellectuals have stated. Let me affirm here that the Arab/Islamic civilization is founded on tolerance, cooperation and mutual understanding among civilizations and on the basis of indigenous religions. It is also founded on constructive dialogue between these religions and other ideologies throughout the world. We believe that such dialogue, which today encompasses the entire world, can help to

refute the false theories and unfair judgements of one civilization against another.

In this connection, the Foreign Minister of the United Kingdom, Mr. Robin Cook stated that

> "some claim that the clash of civilizations is inevitable. I say, however, that this is a serious mistake. We do not want anyone to oppose Islam, which can be a true friend. We may have different religions and cultures, but that does not mean that we cannot all coexist, achieve mutual understanding, learn from one another or enjoy mutual trust so that every civilization may all contribute to others without losing its individual identity."

If dialogue among civilizations is to be strong and solid, effective and balanced, it must be founded on the following principles. First, it must adhere to the principles of justice, fairness and peace founded on justice, as well as to the principles of international law and the United Nations Charter.

Second, we need to promote international cooperation in order to enhance globally shared values, to eliminate international threats and to seek common denominators among the various civilizations and within each civilization for addressing the joint universal challenges we face.

Third, since the dignity and equality of all men must be upheld, we must spare no effort in overcoming the problem of cultural and civilizational hegemony and in discouraging international theories and practices that tend to exacerbate the clash of civilizations.

Fourth, Governments and relevant institutions must play a central role in promoting and facilitating dialogue among civilizations and its methods.

Fifth, international organizations, the United Nations system in particular, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and regional organizations must all play a key role, since they constitute an appropriate framework for promoting dialogue among civilizations.

Sixth, educational institutions and universities throughout the world must promote the definition, effects and importance of dialogue among civilizations.

Seventh, a key element of dialogue among civilizations is the use of principles contained in the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, adopted under General Assembly resolution 53/243 of 13 September 1999. These principles include the promotion of the peaceful settlement of disputes; mutual respect; cooperation; international understanding; full implementation of international commitments under the United Nations Charter and international law; seeking effective solutions to the external debt of developing countries; and the elimination of all barriers hindering the exercise of peoples' right to self-determination, particularly those peoples who still labour under the yoke of colonialism or other forms of foreign domination. All resolutions confirm the struggle of such peoples as internationally legitimate and legal. It is also necessary to help refugees and displaced persons to return to their homeland and to reaffirm the principle of the illegitimacy of the annexation of land by force or war, and the need to condemn and eliminate occupation, which is unacceptable in a culture of peace.

In the light of all this, my delegation supports draft resolution A/54/L.60 under consideration by the General Assembly and hopes that it will be adopted by consensus.

Culture and civilization are strengthened by politics, which is in turn enhanced by culture. We believe that such a political factor requires the implementation of the United Nations Charter, which is the international constitution of our international family and the very foundation of dialogue among civilizations through which justice and the freedom, equality, security and stability of peoples can be achieved. A failure to implement the Charter will cause the gap to widen between industrialized and developing countries. The dialogue among civilizations means mutual acceptance and recognition of the contributions of every civilization to the building of world civilization and of its immense creative potential to provide mankind as a whole with a life in dignity. This will help us to work together, despite our diverse cultures and societies, to build a world society in which all States and individuals can enjoy a life of dignity and practise the values of justice and peace.

The Acting President: In accordance with the decision taken at the 77th plenary meeting, I now call on the observer of Switzerland.

Mr. Maurer (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland is particularly attentive to the theme of the dialogue among civilizations. For 10 centuries now it has

practised within its territory the peaceful coexistence of four linguistic cultures and two major Christian religions. It has also long been a country of immigration, with currently more than a 20 per cent foreign population residing on its soil, in addition to hundreds of thousands of immigrants who have been naturalized over time. As a multicultural country, Switzerland has experienced the reality that dialogue among people of different cultural identities is not only necessary and possible, but infinitely enriching. My country has also learned that peaceful coexistence is never a given, but requires constant effort. The Swiss could not imagine their country without all the other cultures that make up and enrich it.

I am convinced that things are no different for the planet as a whole, which is involved in a process of integration at an ever-growing speed and is becoming what is called a global village. This village requires a common basis of ethics that can guide the conduct of its inhabitants above and beyond the legal rights of people. Switzerland believes that the dialogue among civilizations is one of the best means to seek this common basis that rests on global consensus.

Switzerland is pleased, therefore, by the steps taken by the Secretary-General to prepare for and facilitate this dialogue, and we especially welcome the appointment of Mr. Giandomenico Picco as Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, and we will do our utmost to support his efforts. The Swiss Government has decided to finance part of the infrastructure that will be required by the Personal Representative and to make a payment of $150,000 in this connection.

We are also in the process of thinking, in the context of the provisional report of the Secretary-General, about specific projects that can be part of the Year of Dialogue. I am thinking particularly about the multilateral framework offered by the United Nations system, but also of bilateral dialogues with certain interested countries, and finally, about dialogue at the domestic level, where it has a rightful place, particularly in the framework of the harmonious integration of people of other cultures.

The concept outlined in the report of the Secretary-General's Personal Representative (A/54/546, annex) seems to be aimed in the right direction. We particularly agree with the report's view that the dialogue among civilizations does not start from zero, but that it can benefit from various elements of the existing United Nations framework, including its principles of tolerance and the culture of peace. The idea of creating an organic link between the year 2000, International Year for the Culture of Peace, and the year 2001, Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, is excellent. I note with satisfaction the pragmatism and concrete spirit of the provisional report. The Personal Representative of the Secretary-General has striven to give meaning to existing events and people that symbolize dialogue.

Specific projects that bring people together are more promising than great abstract debates. States will have to provide the framework necessary for dialogue and allow as large a place as possible to representatives of civil society. I am thinking first and foremost about the young generations, but also about those who represent culture, science and universities. Good coordination with other initiatives along the same lines, particularly within the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, will also be valuable. The United Nations will have to coordinate activities, and I hope it will also serve as a catalyst.

We note with concern a common trait of conflicts arising in recent years: the perception of diversity as a threat, as stated in the report of the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General. On the basis of its own experience, Switzerland stands with conviction alongside those who consider difference as a key element of progress, rather than a threat. The provisional report rightly emphasizes that acceptance of diversity is a basic tenet of the United Nations. It also shows a close link between fundamental concepts, such as tolerance, human rights, pluralism and the culture of peace. These values are mutually reinforced when practised within and between countries. The commitment of States to these values must be an ongoing effort if we want the clash of civilizations to remain a false prophecy. The Year of Dialogue among Civilizations will make it possible to focus such efforts.

In conclusion, I wish to stress what I consider to be most essential: the Year of Dialogue will attain its objectives only if the very idea of dialogue, as well as the values closely linked to it, can be put into practice to lessen tensions and to prevent or even resolve conflicts. In this connection, Switzerland hopes that this initiative will successfully lead to one or more reconciliation processes in the world. If so, the Year of Dialogue will leave a tangible and concrete mark by contributing to help those — too many, unfortunately — who are victims of conflicts originating in intolerance and lack of understanding.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 3369 (XXX) of 10 October 1975, I call on the observer of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Mr. Lamani (Organization of the Islamic Conference) (*spoke in Arabic*): Dialogue and interaction among civilizations have enabled them to achieve lofty values and moral principles and have provided many opportunities for constructive cooperation to fulfil all humanity's aspirations to peace, progress, security, prosperity and justice. All civilizations throughout history have created extraordinary heritages through these values and moral principles, which have become essential for international action that would replace policies based on force, violence and exploitation.

History shows that the ancient and enlightened Islamic civilization has contributed to the prosperity of mankind in the spiritual, philosophical, scientific, artistic, literary and many other fields. It is a civilization based on faith, but at the same time it has made a constructive contribution to the flourishing of culture, literature and science. This has led to prosperity, which in turn has solidified progress in dignity and has helped establish a common human heritage as a result of interaction between cultures throughout history — between Persian and Greek wisdom and between many other peoples, whether in Africa, in Asia or in Europe. Thus, it has enriched other civilizations that have successively carried the flame of knowledge and human solidarity.

It is hardly surprising that at the last session of the General Assembly a resolution was adopted on the dialogue among civilizations, at the initiative of Mr. Mohammad Khatami, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Chairman of the Eighth Summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), who acted on his belief in the common destiny of mankind and in equality among individuals and peoples throughout the world, whatever their colour, their language, their race or their cultural or religious identity.

At their twenty-sixth meeting, held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, from 28 June to 1 July 1999, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the OIC renewed their States' faith that cultural and civilizational diversity has always been an effective tool for progress and prosperity in seeking a better future for humankind. They also expressed their full respect for the noble principles and values engendered by all human civilizations, which constitute a solid basis for fruitful cooperation among peoples. This could be an example for international behaviour for the next millennium.

Pursuant to the spirit of General Assembly resolution 5322 and an initiative by the Eighth Summit of the OIC, a seminar was held in Tehran from 3 to 5 May 1999 to deal with the topics and methodology for dialogue among Muslims and with other civilizations in order to find ways of common understanding for fruitful cooperation and to determine moral values that should be the foundation for such dialogue. Following that seminar, a Declaration on Dialogue among Civilizations was adopted that made respect for man's dignity, equality, mutual respect, recognition of diversity and tolerance essential elements. It also stated that there was a need to find a common understanding that would guarantee respect for the principles of justice, fairness and peace. The document also reaffirmed areas of dialogue to safeguard human rights, trust, cultural identity and traditional values.

The Ministers for Foreign Affairs adopted this Declaration during their meeting and urged members to cooperate closely with the United Nations and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in order to prepare a draft international declaration on dialogue among contemporary civilizations that would enshrine common principles and moral values and that would serve as a point of reference for international conduct in the next millennium. It would also cooperate to prepare a programme of action at the national, regional, and international levels.

While we welcome this trend towards dialogue and cooperation for a better future, we should not forget that interaction among civilizations throughout history has produced both stability and instability. We have not always seen peaceful history; we have had ups and downs, and we think that humanity, throughout its long history, has never been so enormously threatened and endangered as it is today.

Of course, it is true that at no time has any country been shielded from war. Entire peoples have perhaps been slaughtered through genocide — whole parts of the world have been subject to destruction because of civil, colonial or religious wars. But none of these conflicts have been a genuine threat to the survival of humankind. However, today there are still serious threats posed by existing arsenals of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. These weapons could put an end to all forms of life on our planet. On the other hand, in

spite of the unlimited dissemination of and exceptional progress in communications and information technology, better human understanding has not been achieved. This has not allowed us to have more solid bases for coexistence in a climate of peace.

This is why we hope, as we approach a new millennium, that humankind will stop and think about ways to achieve a better future — a prosperous and peaceful one — so that dialogue will be successful and will identify objectives for establishing a basis for a system for peaceful coexistence, one that would guarantee diversity, consistency and complementarity among civilizations. Mr. Azeddine Laraki, Secretary-General of the OIC, created a unit within the OIC secretariat, under the chairmanship of Ambassador Ibrahim Auf, Assistant Secretary-General for Social Affairs, to serve as a liaison for the preparation of the International Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

A number of events have taken place since the adoption of last year's resolution in this regard. On 1 October last, we organized an exhibit on Islamic civilization during the current session of the General Assembly and in cooperation with the Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York, aimed at fostering a better understanding and knowledge of our civilization.

In this regard, I would like to praise the United Nations Secretary-General for his tireless efforts and also wish to express our satisfaction with his decision to appoint Mr. Giandomenico Picco as his Personal Representative for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. His appointment will effectively help us make progress in the preparation for such dialogue.

In conclusion, I must renew the readiness of the OIC to cooperate fully and closely for the success of all events in connection with this dialogue among civilizations, in order to achieve the noble objectives to which we all aspire.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

I call on the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Fadaifard (Islamic Republic of Iran): Allow me to make a correction to the oral revision my delegation proposed this morning.

In the seventh preambular paragraph, please insert "promote culture of peace," before "remove threats to peace". The paragraph will therefore read,

> "Emphasizing the indispensable role of dialogue as a means to reach understanding, promote [a] culture of peace, remove threats to peace and strengthen interaction and exchange among and within civilizations".

While I have the floor, I have the honour to point out for the record that the delegations of Cameroon, Canada, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, El Salvador, Latvia, Lebanon, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, New Zealand, the Syrian Arab Republic, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Yemen have joined as sponsors of draft resolution A/54/L.60.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/54/L.60, entitled "United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations".

May I take it that the General Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/54/L.60, as orally revised?

Draft resolution A/54/L.60, as orally revised, was adopted (resolution 54/113).

The Acting President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 34?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 20 *(continued)* **and agenda item 50**

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

(f) Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan

The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/54/297, A/54/378, A/54/536)

Letter from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly (A/54/626)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.58)

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.58.

Mr. Kastrup (Germany): I am pleased to introduce a draft resolution on Afghanistan under items 20 (f) and 50 of the agenda. The text we are introducing today represents a compromise that accommodates the different views of all delegations involved in the consultations. More than 80 countries participated in the negotiations, and I would like to thank them for their contributions and efforts that led to the text that is being presented today. Our intention during the negotiations was to secure consensus on this draft resolution, as we did in previous years. In keeping with this tradition, I trust that the draft resolution will again be adopted without a vote.

More than 80 Member States are sponsors of the draft resolution at the moment. The following countries, which do not appear in document A/54/L.58, have also joined as sponsors of this draft resolution: Argentina, Belarus, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Madagascar, Mali, the Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Samoa, Seychelles, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uruguay. These sponsors send a strong message to the warring Afghan parties and to all States concerned that it is the will of the international community that peace return to Afghanistan.

I would like to express my gratitude to all sponsors and invite other members that have not yet done so to co-sponsor the draft resolution. The list of sponsors will remain open until the draft resolution is before the Assembly for adoption. As the draft resolution still has to pass the Fifth Committee, this will be at the very end of this session of the General Assembly.

The draft resolution I am introducing today covers both political and humanitarian questions. Let me focus on the most important issues.

The situation in Afghanistan has continued to deteriorate in the past 12 months. The level of fighting reached an unprecedented scale at the end of July 1999, when the Taliban launched a ground and air offensive against the United Front. This offensive started only one week after the meeting of the "six plus two" group in Tashkent. It started despite repeated demands by the Security Council to stop the fighting and despite continuing attempts by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan to avert this Taliban offensive. The offensive has aggravated the already grave humanitarian and human rights situation and has led to massive loss of human life, executions, deliberate abuse and arbitrary detention of civilians, refugee flows, harassment, forcible displacement of civilians and extensive destruction of property.

In view of this grave situation, the draft resolution expresses the conviction that there is no military solution to the Afghan conflict. Despite repeated international appeals not to launch military offensives against each other, both Afghan parties continue fighting and still seem to believe, against all evidence to the contrary, that there can be a military solution. We call on the Afghan factions to stop looking for such a solution and to stop concentrating their efforts on the continuation of the war. They should instead focus their energies on the search for peace and on the reconstruction of their country. The draft resolution therefore calls upon all Afghan parties to immediately cease all armed hostilities, to renounce the use of force and to engage without delay or preconditions in a political dialogue under United Nations auspices. This dialogue should be aimed at achieving a lasting political settlement of the conflict by creating a broad-based, multi-ethnic and fully representative government acceptable to the Afghan people.

In accordance with previous resolutions on Afghanistan, the draft resolution that is being introduced reiterates that the main responsibility for a peaceful solution to the conflict lies with the Afghan parties. We welcome the intra-Afghan meetings held in Ashgabat and Tashkent, and we strongly urge all parties to take further confidence-building measures with a view to resuming direct intra-Afghan talks.

Despite the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, foreign military support to the Afghan parties continued through 1999. This military support consisted not only in the supply of arms, ammunition and military equipment, but also included the presence and involvement of foreign military personnel on the ground. The draft resolution condemns the continued foreign military support to the Afghan parties and calls upon all States to take resolute measures to prohibit their military personnel from planning and participating in combat operations in Afghanistan, to immediately withdraw their personnel and

to ensure that the supply of ammunition and other war-making materials is halted.

We note with concern that, following years of negotiations, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General has had to freeze his activities because of the warring parties' insufficient cooperation. We hope that circumstances will quickly change so that he can again intervene.

Germany has always supported the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA). The draft resolution therefore supports the intention of the Secretary-General to redouble the efforts of UNSMA to achieve an immediate and durable ceasefire and the resumption of the dialogue between the Afghan parties.

We also support the intention of the Secretary-General that UNSMA should carefully monitor and encourage the various peace initiatives of non-United Nations actors, notably from the Afghan diaspora, while continuing to cooperate closely with the countries that are willing to help find a peaceful solution to the Afghan conflict, including those not represented in the "six plus two" group.

Germany further supports UNSMA's new Civil Affairs Unit, which will work inside Afghanistan with the primary objective of promoting respect for minimum humanitarian standards and deterring massive and systematic violations of human rights in the future. We hope that the deployment of a first group of civil affairs officers will be completed as soon as possible.

The United Nations cannot solve the Afghanistan conflict without the support of the international community in general and involved neighbouring countries in particular. The end of military support from outside is an essential prerequisite for the solution of the conflict in Afghanistan. The political will of the neighbouring countries to stop military support is essential, as they control all access to the landlocked country of Afghanistan. Therefore this draft resolution calls upon all signatories of the Tashkent Declaration on Fundamental Principles for a Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict in Afghanistan, adopted by the "six plus two" Group on 19 July 1999, to implement the principles contained therein, in particular the agreement of members of the group not to provide military support to any Afghan party and to prevent the use of their territories for such purposes. It is our conviction that if neighbouring countries decided to have peace in Afghanistan, we would be much closer to a solution to the Afghanistan conflict.

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, unfortunately, has not notably changed during the last 12 months. The country's population continues to live under most deplorable circumstances. We are distressed that the bombing of civilians in Afghanistan continues. We are deeply concerned about the misery and despair caused by the wholesale destruction of houses, agricultural land and crops. The forced displacement of thousands of Afghans to the Shomali plains has created an almost unbearable environment. Men, women and children have to live without shelter or food, far from their homes.

In this context, it is with a certain relief that we learned of the recently established corridor through the front line. It enables United Nations organizations to provide internally displaced persons with the necessary goods. A first convoy passed the front line several days ago — a sign of hope for the innocent victims of a meaningless war. We call upon all fighting parties to ensure unimpeded access to the affected population for the humanitarian personnel of the United Nations and its organizations as well as that of non-governmental organizations.

Germany continues to be deeply concerned about the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan. Notably in areas under the control of the Taliban, gender discrimination is systematically applied. The draft resolution states very clearly that the international community does not accept the exclusion of women and girls from public life. United Nations organizations have stated that there has been some progress concerning the access of women and girls to education and health care. We note this improvement, though it is far from being satisfactory, and we encourage all parties, especially the Taliban, to grant women their internationally guaranteed basic rights.

Another matter of concern is the safety and security of humanitarian personnel in Afghanistan. We strongly condemn the recent acts of violence against United Nations offices and United Nations personnel in various places in the country. We urge all parties to fully cooperate with the United Nations organizations in the field and to ensure their security.

Unfortunately, the laying of landmines has continued over the past year. My country attaches the highest priority to the complete cessation of landmine usage.

The conflict in Afghanistan has international implications, not only for the neighbouring countries but

also for countries far beyond the region. This year Afghanistan has become by far the world's largest illicit producer of opium. Its output amounts to 75 per cent of the opium produced worldwide. Opium cultivation in Afghanistan has increased by 43 per cent over the previous year. This draft therefore strongly calls upon all Afghan parties to halt all illegal drug activities and to support international efforts to ban illicit drug production and trafficking. Drug trafficking from Afghanistan, which is associated with arms trafficking and other criminal activities, presents a substantial threat to the countries of the region.

We are deeply concerned that Afghan territory, particularly that under Taliban control, continues to be used to shelter and train terrorists. This draft resolution therefore strongly demands that all Afghan parties, and in particular the Taliban, take effective measures to ensure that the territory under its control is not used for terrorist bases and camps, and take the necessary steps to support efforts to bring indicted terrorists to justice without delay. Terrorists from Afghanistan can easily reach every country of the globe. This represents a serious threat to international peace and security. The bombings of the United States embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in August 1998 demonstrated that countries far away from the region have fallen victim to terrorist acts organized and planned in Afghanistan. In this context I would like to recall Security Council resolution 1267 (1999) of 15 October 1999. We urge the Taliban to comply with this resolution without further delay and to turn over Usama bin Laden in line with the resolution.

We hope that the draft resolution will be adopted by consensus. It is our deepest conviction that a durable settlement of the Afghan conflict can be achieved only through a ceasefire and a political dialogue. With this draft resolution we wish to send a strong message to the Afghan parties and to the countries with influence in Afghanistan — a message saying that the international community wants the Afghan parties to stop fighting, and a message to the States with influence in Afghanistan to use their influence constructively in coordination with the United Nations, which we unanimously and strongly support.

Let me conclude by expressing our gratitude to the Secretary-General, to the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan and, especially, to the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, for their tireless efforts to promote the peace process in Afghanistan. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all United Nations staff members who have been or still are working in Afghanistan for their excellent work under extreme and often discouraging conditions.

Ms. Korpi (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries, Cyprus and Malta, as well as the European Free Trade Association countries members of the European Economic Area, Iceland and Liechtenstein, align themselves with this statement.

For too many years the conflict in Afghanistan has caused enormous suffering for the Afghan people, who continue to bear the consequences of the civil war. The civilian population longs for peace, justice and order. Furthermore, the chronic fighting threatens the stability of the region and its economic development, causing repercussions far beyond Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries.

The European Union is deeply concerned about the sharp escalation of the military confrontation during the past months. We are dismayed that the Taliban ignored the call in the Tashkent Declaration for the Afghan conflict to be settled through peaceful political negotiation, and instead launched a major offensive. The European Union is particularly concerned about the suffering the fighting has caused to the civilian population and about the deteriorating humanitarian situation of the increasing number of internally displaced persons.

The European Union is profoundly disturbed by the reports of forced deportation of civilians by the Taliban from their places of residence. We urge the Taliban to end this practice immediately and allow those forcibly deported to return. We are equally concerned about the reports of forcible separation of men from their families and other forms of harassment, and about the widespread destruction of homes and agricultural land and crops by the Taliban.

The European Union reiterates its position, as expressed in its common position of 25 January 1999, that there is no military solution to this conflict and that only a political settlement, aimed at the establishment of a fully representative, broad-based Government, can lead to peace and reconciliation. We therefore appeal to all

factions to agree on an immediate ceasefire and enter negotiations under United Nations auspices.

The European Union reaffirms its strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan. We are deeply disturbed by the reports of the growing presence, mainly on the side of the Taliban, of thousands of non-Afghan nationals, who mostly emanate from religious schools in Pakistan. The European Union strongly condemns all foreign interference in Afghanistan and urges that the supply to the warring factions of weapons, munitions and other material for military use, as well as the involvement of foreign military, paramilitary and secret service personnel, immediately stop. In this context, we wish to recall that the European Union continues to enforce the embargo on the export of arms, munitions, and military equipment provided for in its common position on Afghanistan of 17 December 1996, and we urge other countries to adopt a similar policy of restraint.

Moreover, we encourage all countries in the region to support the United Nations in promoting peace in Afghanistan and to use any influence they have in a positive way to convince the Afghan parties to cooperate with the United Nations. We regret that the "six plus two" group has not been able to find a unified approach vis-à-vis the warring parties, and we urge the group to redouble its efforts in this regard.

No society can achieve an acceptable degree of peace, justice and stability without full respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The European Union is deeply disturbed by reports of the killing and harassment of innocent civilians and persistent human rights violations, as well as breaches of humanitarian law in Afghanistan. We are gravely concerned by reports of persecutions based on ethnic origin or religion, which demonstrate the increasingly ethnic nature of the conflict. The European Union is also concerned over reports of the involvement of children in the conflict, and we urge the warring factions to take immediate steps to end this practice.

The European Union calls on all Afghan factions, and in particular the Taliban, to recognize, protect and promote all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to life, liberty and security of person, and to fully respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments to which Afghanistan has subscribed.

The European Union denounces the continuing gender discrimination in Afghanistan. We urge the Afghan factions, and in particular the Taliban, to end discriminatory policies and to recognize, protect and promote the equal rights of women and men, including access to education and health facilities, employment, personal security and freedom from intimidation and harassment. The European Union will continue to take into account discriminatory policies when considering future decisions regarding the supply of aid and support to aid programmes in Afghanistan aimed at integrating gender concerns and actively attempt to promote the equitable participation of both men and women.

The European Union therefore strongly supports the Secretary General's proposal to establish a Civil Affairs Unit within the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA), the primary objectives of which would be to promote respect for minimum humanitarian standards and to deter massive and systematic violations of human rights in the future. We are looking forward to the rapid deployment of this Unit.

For years, the European Union has been the largest donor of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. The European Commission had to suspend funding for projects in Kabul in July 1998 because it had become increasingly difficult for agencies to deliver humanitarian aid in an efficient, effective and principled manner, especially in the health and education sectors. Subsequently, the European Commission had to scale down humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan for security reasons. Nevertheless, humanitarian activities were later resumed at the beginning of 1999, and we wish to continue helping the Afghan people. We would recall, however, that aid can continue only where it can be delivered in an effective manner, without discrimination, and where humanitarian organizations are able to carry out their work freely and safely. The absence of national reconciliation has a negative impact on donors engaged.

The European Union remains deeply concerned about the continuous restrictions imposed on the activities of United Nations and other humanitarian personnel.

In this context, the European Union calls on the Taliban to fully implement the agreements signed with the United Nations on the safety and security of United Nations personnel. We urge the warring factions to ensure the freedom of movement of national and international humanitarian personnel and their free and safe access to all those in need, without restrictions based

on gender, race, religion or nationality, and to cooperate fully and sincerely with humanitarian organizations. In this regard, we condemn in the strongest terms the recent attacks against United Nations personnel and property following the imposition of sanctions against the Taliban by the Security Council.

The European Union strongly supports efforts to improve the effectiveness of aid through close coordination and complementarity between the United Nations peace efforts and the aid effort, as envisaged in the Strategic Framework common to the international donor community and United Nations organizations. Furthermore, the European Union reiterates its call for the Taliban to proceed with the immediate and thorough investigation of the murders of the United Nations staff members as well as the killing of Iranian diplomats during the Taliban attack against Mazar-i-Sharif in August 1998.

The European Union attaches high importance to the fight against illegal drugs and terrorism. Therefore, we are deeply concerned at the significant rise of the production and trafficking of drugs in Afghanistan this year, which further threatens regional stability and damages the health and well-being of the populations of Afghanistan, neighbouring States and elsewhere. We therefore call for a coordinated international response to the Afghan drug threat. In this regard, we recognize the role of the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention in the fight against drugs.

Furthermore, the European Union urges all Afghan parties to refrain from financing or providing training or shelter for terrorist organizations or otherwise supporting terrorist activities. We reiterate our call upon all Afghan factions, and in particular the Taliban, to close down training camps for foreign terrorists inside Afghanistan, and to take the necessary steps to ensure that those responsible for terrorist acts are brought to justice. In this regard, the European Union urges the Taliban to comply with Security Council resolution 1267 (1999) without further delay and to turn over Osama bin Laden in line with that resolution. The European Union and its member States are, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1267 (1999), imposing targeted sanctions against the Taliban.

The European Union is determined to play an effective role in efforts to stop the fighting and to restore peace, stability and respect for international law, including human rights, in Afghanistan. We are committed to making every effort to bring about a sustainable peace in Afghanistan, to put an end to foreign intervention, an encourage intra-Afghan dialogue, in particular thro support for the central role of the United Nations. will also continue to give our full support to Un Nations efforts in promoting peace and security Afghanistan. In this regard, we would like to express support for the Secretary-General's intention strengthen the United Nations Special Mission Afghanistan (UNSMA) with a view to assuring primary role in conducting United Nations peacema activities in Afghanistan.

The European Union encourages in particular joint initiative organized by the Council for Peace National Unity in Afghanistan to convene a Loya Jirg We welcome the Rome meeting of November 1 because it was clearly based on the principle Afghanistan's future must be decided by Afgh themselves.

Finally, we would like to express our apprecia for the efforts made by UNSMA and by the Spe Envoy of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan. We with concern that the lack of progress so far in negotiations with the parties to the conflict has led to freezing of the activities of the Special Envoy, and hope that increased readiness by the parties to the con to cooperate with the Special Envoy will enable him resume his activities.

Mr. Ortique (United States of America): United States is pleased to be sponsoring draft resolu A/54/L.58, which highlights the internatio community's commitment to addressing the devasta effects of 20 years of civil war in Afghanistan and mistaken policies of authorities there. My cou continues to be concerned about the serious humanita crisis in northern Afghanistan. Up to 65,000 pers displaced by the Taliban in fighting just this summer currently taking refuge in the opposition-contro Panjshir valley. As winter sets in, they face seri shortages of food and shelter. Thousands of others h fled to Kabul and need support there. We welcome Taliban's cooperation in allowing a United Nati humanitarian aid convoy to cross front lines into Panjshir valley, and we urge them to continue to ens that food assistance reaches the neediest in Afghanist

Persistent violations of human rights, especi those of women and girls, remain a primary concern the United States. We were appalled by reports of gross and systematic abuse of civilians during fighting

the Shomali plains in July, including separation of men from their families, summary executions and burning of homes, fields and orchards. On the other hand, we applaud the establishment of a Civil Affairs Unit within the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA) to promote respect for human rights, and we look for the deployment of the first group of civil affairs officers as soon as conditions allow.

We are alarmed that Afghanistan this year became the world's largest producer of illicit opium. The Secretary-General has reported that the number of hectares under opium poppy production is 43 per cent higher this year, and that opium poppy production has spread to 104 districts in Afghanistan, 31 more than last year. This is in direct conflict with the pledge made by the Taliban to the Executive Director of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme that they would support the elimination of all opium poppy. My country declares that all Afghan parties must halt illegal drug activities and cooperate with international efforts to stop the production and trafficking of illegal drugs everywhere.

The Taliban's continued harbouring of international terrorists in Afghanistan is of urgent concern to all nations. Bin Laden and his network continue to threaten not only the safety of Americans all over the world, but also other citizens in countless countries who may become victims of his terrorist policies.

Security Council resolution 1267 (1999) was an important step in combating international terrorism. The international community has sent a clear message to the Taliban that they must turn over Bin Laden to a country where he will be brought to justice. We have been gratified to hear from many Member States that they have taken action to implement sanctions against the Taliban. We urge all Member States to implement sanctions rapidly and fully and to assist the Security Council sanctions Committee by providing information on Taliban assets and aircraft in their countries.

I want to underscore that these sanctions are targeted against the Taliban. They have been carefully designed to minimize the impact on the people of Afghanistan and to allow humanitarian assistance to continue unimpeded. Neither the United States nor the international community has abandoned the Afghan people. The Afghan Support Group met this week in Ottawa to better coordinate international assistance. The United States continues to be the single largest donor to humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan, giving approximately $70 million in the last fiscal year, and has pledged over $0.5 million in response to the recent food crisis in Afghanistan.

But this has been a discouraging year for those who seek peace in Afghanistan: the Taliban launched a major military offensive; intra-Afghan talks under United Nations auspices have been suspended; the "six plus two" process has been of limited utility; foreign military support to Afghan parties continues; security concerns have kept most United Nations international staff out of Afghanistan; and Special Envoy Brahimi has frozen his activities.

One of the few rays of light has been the initiative of the former King of Afghanistan, Zahir Shah, to bring together a wide spectrum of Afghans to discuss a peaceful resolution of the conflict. A cross-section of Afghans met in Rome, from 22 to 25 November, to discuss plans for convening an emergency *Loya Jirgah*, which would provide the means for the Afghan people themselves to shape their future without outside interference. The United States encourages all Afghan parties to continue exploring avenues to a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

As winter sets in, the military situation in Afghanistan is largely in stalemate. Neither side appears strong enough to defeat the other. The chronic fighting promises only to produce more human suffering, more human rights violations, more illegal drug activity and more support for terrorism. My country urges the warring parties to set down their weapons and set the stage for Afghans throughout the world to negotiate an end to a conflict that has gone on far too long. If the Afghans will it, it can and will be done.

Mr. Yamazaki (Japan): Let me begin by expressing my delegation's appreciation to the Secretary-General for preparing the reports on agenda items 20 (f) and 50. I would also like to thank most heartily the delegation of Germany for coordinating the important draft resolution before us. The draft resolution covers, in a comprehensive manner, issues related to Afghanistan in the areas of peace, security and humanitarian assistance, and it enjoys my Government's full support. We hope that it will be adopted by consensus.

Japan shares the deep concern expressed by the international community in the past months over recent developments in Afghanistan, where factional fighting has intensified and many people have been forcibly displaced from their homes. The suffering of the civilian population

is increasing, and neighbouring countries are concerned about the influx of refugees. An additional source of great concern to us is the reported doubling of the opium poppy production in Afghanistan in the past year.

Japan supports the valuable efforts being made by the Secretary-General, his Special Envoy, Ambassador Brahimi, and the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan to restore peace to that war-ravaged country. We equally value the activities of the United Nations humanitarian organizations in Afghanistan. We recognize that they are working under extremely difficult conditions, but we encourage them to continue their crucial endeavours. Japan also appreciates the efforts made by the "six plus two" group, composed of the six States bordering Afghanistan as well as the Russian Federation and the United States of America, and hopes that their work, together with the additional efforts of other Member States, will complement the work of the United Nations and hasten a settlement of the conflict. Japan calls upon the parties to the conflict, especially the Taliban, to comply with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council so that a durable peace may finally be achieved in Afghanistan. We wish to reaffirm our belief that the conflict in Afghanistan can be settled only through peaceful negotiations with the objective of establishing a broad-based, multi-ethnic and representative government.

Today I would like to highlight four elements that are essential for the achievement of a peaceful settlement of this prolonged conflict.

First, the Taliban and the other Afghan factions should immediately cease fighting and resume their dialogue. A durable peace can be achieved only through peaceful means, and we support all efforts towards that end. In this context, I wish to reiterate my Government's offer to host a meeting at which all Afghan factions can engage in dialogue in neutral surroundings, with the aim of finding a way to achieve national reconciliation.

Secondly, the countries concerned, and neighbouring countries in particular, should not interfere in the conflict, but rather should use their influence on the warring factions to bring the fighting to an end. It is especially important that all concerned stop extending military assistance or supplying arms to the warring factions and that they refrain from any other measures that could prolong the hostilities.

Thirdly, in view of the tremendous human suffering of the Afghan people, the international community should continue to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. The Afghanistan Support Group, whose sixth meeting was held in Canada this week, is performing a crucial service by exploring ways to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of such assistance. Japan, for its part, has provided humanitarian assistance through United Nations agencies and programmes, amounting to $400 million over the past 10 years.

Fourthly, the international community should convey to the Afghan factions, their leaders and the people a clear message that it will extend assistance to their national reconstruction efforts once the fighting ceases and peace is restored and a broad-based, multi-ethnic and representative government is formed. The establishment of such a government is indispensable for the provision of reconstruction assistance by the international community. We hope that such a strong international commitment will encourage the warring factions to come to the negotiating table and settle the dispute peacefully. Japan, for its part, renews its own commitment and readiness to contribute to the reconstruction of Afghanistan once peace has been restored.

The path to peace in Afghanistan is a long and arduous one. I believe, however, that the international community must persist in its efforts to convince the conflicting parties that the achievement of durable peace will be to their benefit. Japan will continue to play an active role in this endeavour.

Mr. Vural (Turkey): There is no doubt, and the Secretary-General's report clearly testifies to this fact, that the political and humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan continues to be one of the most preoccupying and pressing problems of the international community. In Turkey, we have deep-rooted historical and cultural ties with the Afghan people. Our only desire is to see the emergence of a stable, peaceful and prosperous nation. This summer the level of fighting reached an unprecedented level when the Taliban forces launched their large-scale military offensive. This military campaign brought new problems to the already grave humanitarian and human rights situation on the ground. We are deeply concerned by the human rights violations, the discrimination against girls and women and acts of religious extremism, especially in areas under the control of the Taliban.

The by-products of the Afghan crisis — such as refugees, illicit cultivation and trafficking of narcotic

drugs, and shelter for international terrorism — have taken on transborder dimensions with international implications. In Afghanistan, drugs, terror and arms are creating a vicious cycle, destructive for all. The United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention advocates a coordinated international response to the threats emanating from Afghanistan. We share this view.

The ethnic and religious nature of the conflict has entailed gross human rights violations, murders and the displacement of populations in northern Afghanistan. In this respect, specific cases, such as the tragic murder of United Nations personnel and of the Iranian diplomats, remain to be thoroughly investigated by the Taliban. The increased humanitarian needs arising from the intensification of the conflict in Afghanistan have confirmed the importance of the humanitarian operations of the United Nations agencies and its partners. However, the security problems of and the constraints on the access of United Nations humanitarian assistance are adding to the suffering of the people.

Turkey appointed a coordinator for Afghanistan at the ambassadorial level in September 1998, with the objective of establishing contacts with the parties in Afghanistan and with the interested States and of contributing to finding a solution to the Afghan problem through peaceful means. Our first-hand observations confirm the obvious: there can be no military solution to the Afghan crisis. The only viable solution to the problem remains the establishment of a broad-based, multi-ethnic government in which all the parties are represented. The parties can benefit from traditional methods, such as a *Loya Jirgah* or from modern concepts that would lead to the establishment of a new representative body acceptable to the people of Afghanistan. However, such a reconciliation process cannot resume unless a ceasefire is declared and a true dialogue begins among the parties. This stands as a primary task.

The preservation of the territorial integrity and independence of Afghanistan is of utmost importance. Collective diplomatic efforts, with the United Nations playing the central role, continue to be the only efficient instrument that might lead the Afghan parties to a dialogue. The activities of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, are commendable and should be accorded the solid backing of the international community. The Organization of the Islamic Conference should also maintain its useful cooperation with the United Nations regarding Afghanistan.

Turkey is currently working on launching a humanitarian aid programme which will directly target the Afghan people as a whole. We are giving priority to the neediest, among them the disabled, infants and widows. We believe that the humanitarian aid schemes targeting Afghanistan should be broad-based, covering all segments of Afghan society. Turkey is also considering contributing to the United Nations humanitarian aid programme for Afghanistan.

We believe that the Afghan people look forward to rebuilding their unity and harmony. The tormenting experience they have gone through only vindicates their aspiration for national reconciliation. Turkey, as always, is ready to contribute to such an outcome. It is with this purpose that we support and co-sponsor the draft resolution before the General Assembly. I would like to thank the Government and the delegation of Germany for coordinating the preparation of this excellent draft resolution. We hope that its adoption by consensus will constitute a further step in the right direction.

Mr. Nejad Hosseinian (Islamic Republic of Iran): I wish to begin by expressing my thanks to the Secretary-General for the complete report that we have received from him on the situation in Afghanistan. I should also like to thank him for the regular reports we received every three months throughout last year on the same issue. These reports reflect the sustained and dedicated efforts of the Secretary-General himself, as well as of his Special Envoy, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, and his colleagues in the Department of Political Affairs and the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA), to bring about a political settlement to the crisis in Afghanistan.

Mr. Stanislaus (Grenada), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Since last year's debate in the General Assembly on Afghanistan, the situation in that war-stricken country has, unfortunately, further deteriorated and the humanitarian situation worsened. Blatantly disregarding the international community's efforts for a peaceful settlement of the conflict and the desire of the Afghan people to reach national reconciliation, the Taliban made another futile attempt last summer to solve the problem by armed force. The counter-offensive launched one week later by the United Front resulted in its recapturing virtually all the lost ground, demonstrating once again that military action is not a solution.

Although the fighting made no overall difference to the military balance between the two warring sides, it added to the misery of the civilian population. Credible and continuing reports from Afghanistan indicated that the Taliban adopted what amounted to a scorched-earth policy in those areas where their offensive took place. There are reliable reports that the Taliban have intentionally burned houses and villages and systematically destroyed the agricultural base in the Shomali plains in order to dissuade the displaced inhabitants from going back.

The Secretary-General, in his report contained in document A/54/378, points out that

> "The Taliban's conduct of forced displacement of the civilian population during their recent offensive in the Shomali plains is a particularly alarming signal which reflects the movement's apparent disregard for the concerns expressed by the international community." (*A/54/378, para. 39*)

The Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, in his briefing to the Security Council on 27 August 1999, provided the Council with detailed accounts of what he referred to as a "scorched-earth policy" conducted by the Taliban in the same area.

The acts committed by the Taliban in the Shomali plains appear to follow the same pattern as the massacre of thousands of innocent people in the wake of the Taliban capture of Mazar-i-Sharif in August 1998 and the systematic ethnic cleansing in Bamian in April and May this year, which were meant to change the demographic map of Afghanistan. We are deeply concerned by the ethnic nature of the conflict and by reports of persecution on the grounds of ethnic origin and religious persuasion. We regret that the conditions for investigation of the massacres committed previously by the Taliban were not met and that the preventive effect of such an investigation was thwarted. We also regret that Afghan women and girls continue to be denied access to health care, education and employment in all areas under the control of the Taliban.

While the situation in Afghanistan remains tragic, its wider repercussions are becoming ever more dangerous. The region and the wider world continue to be affected by the instability spreading from the lawlessness and chaos associated with this conflict and the wide-ranging threats arising from it: drug trafficking, refugee crisis and terrorism.

A chaotic situation, on the one hand, and the ill advised policy pursued by the Taliban, on the other, hav allowed Afghanistan to become by far the world's large producer of opium, with, as the Secretary-General put i 75 per cent of the world's opium production. Moreove the statistics provided by the United Nations Internation Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) show that the illic production of opium in Afghanistan roughly doubled 1998 and 1999 to a record 4,600 metric tonnes.

It is self-evident that the rising trend in dru trafficking originating from the territory held by t Taliban is indeed a devastating and threatening glob menace which affects all human societies. It is not on inflicting national human and financial damage, but prone to cause inter-State tension, which may lead regional and international instability.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, sharing a long bord with Afghanistan, is currently engaged in a costly w against heavily armed drug traffickers on its easte borders. Since the beginning of the current year, 1 Iranian anti-drug personnel have lost their lives confrontation with armed smugglers, raising the to number of forces killed in this field to 2,852 since 198 This year, a total of 170 metric tonnes of narcotics ha been seized. The Islamic Republic of Iran has allocat billions of dollars to anti-drug projects in the past tw decades, with the estimated cost of next year's campai alone surpassing $1 billion.

We are of the view that the question of dr trafficking remains the common responsibility of nations, especially those that have the greatest capabilit to confront this issue. Our efforts in this regard cou succeed if coupled with the meaningful support a practical cooperation of the international community. W strongly believe that the United Nations system, as w as Member States, should play a more active part providing meaningful political, material and financ assistance to countries neighbouring Afghanistan in orc to strengthen their border security. I cannot fail express appreciation for the practical initiatives wh have been taken by UNDCP in providing assistance strengthen the national basis for combating illicit drugs our region.

My country has had to carry a disproportion burden of the decades-long struggle in Afghanistan. W continue to host significant numbers of Afghan refuge Unfortunately, the periodic resumption of the fighting northern and central Afghanistan and the lack of will

work towards peace not only have created new internal displacements and fresh refugee flows to our country, but also undermine seriously the efforts towards voluntary repatriation of the Afghan refugees.

Despite the fact that nearly 2 million Afghan refugees living in Iran continue to place unduly heavy burdens on our country's limited resources, the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to abide by its international commitments in this respect. Likewise, owing to the international scope and nature of refugee crises, recognized by the relevant convention, we hope that other Member States will also confirm their commitments to the relevant convention by trying more effectively to put an end to the Afghan crisis and assisting more seriously those refugees living in Iran and those willing to return to Afghanistan.

Furthermore, lawlessness in Afghanistan continues to provide favourable conditions for terrorist bases and training camps. This situation obviously has negative implications for peace and security in the region and far beyond. While condemning the Taliban leadership for harbouring and maintaining terrorist camps in the Afghan territory under their control, we believe that terrorism is only one of the many side effects of the lingering conflict in Afghanistan, and that it cannot be addressed effectively and adequately unless the international community takes resolute action to stop the fighting in Afghanistan.

Adding to the destabilizing effects of the situation are disturbing reports about thousands of non-Afghan nationals taking part in the fighting on the side of the Taliban. If this trend is not reversed, the nature of the senseless war in Afghanistan may increasingly evolve towards an even more widespread and destructive regional conflict. Therefore, we call upon all concerned to adopt strict measures aimed at preventing their nationals from joining the Afghan parties.

We deeply regret that the summer military offensive by the Taliban took place in the wake of the high-level meeting of the "six plus two" group in Tashkent, held last July. At the same time, we take note of the continued readiness of the United Front to engage in a peace process with the Taliban, as noted by the Secretary-General in his two previous reports, and we regret that the Taliban continue to reject such a constructive approach.

The international character of and the apparent lack of solution for the situation in Afghanistan call for a reinforced effort of the United Nations and its Member States. We appeal to them to continue their efforts in order to bring an early end to the fighting and to promote the negotiating process in Afghanistan. Despite its shortcomings, the "six plus two" group remains a useful forum and mechanism in the peace process and should therefore be supported by the international community. We hope that the failure of the latest offensive by the Taliban to achieve its key objective will finally persuade them and their supporters that further fighting is futile and will encourage them to support peace initiatives.

We believe it is timely to recall that all of the resolutions of the Security Council on Afghanistan have been adopted unanimously, and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly have gained increasing support from Member States with each passing year. At the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, nearly one third of the delegations sponsored the resolution on Afghanistan. It is even more encouraging to see that the number of sponsors of the current draft resolution has so far grown to nearly half of the general United Nations membership. Such strong support for the General Assembly draft resolution would indicate with great seriousness that ignoring the decisions of the United Nations and openly defying the international community cannot be continued with impunity.

The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to believe that because of the historical realities and the traditional and multi-ethnic structure of Afghanistan, only a genuinely broad-based, multi-ethnic and fully representative government which protects the rights of all Afghan people, with no distinction, can bring peace and normalcy to Afghanistan.

The issue of the tragic murder of the staff of the Consulate-General of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Republic News Agency's correspondent in Mazar-e-Sharif by the Taliban forces in August 1998 is still pending and remains unresolved. The Taliban, as the international community, including the Council itself, is fully aware, continue to stubbornly disregard the rules of international law and have yet to implement Security Council resolution 1214 (1998), which condemned this crime and in paragraph 5 called upon "the Taliban to cooperate with the United Nations in investigating these crimes with a view to prosecuting those responsible". I would like to emphasize that the Islamic Republic of Iran is determined to vigorously pursue the matter to a conclusion by which justice is served. We remain hopeful that the United Nations will continue its valuable efforts in this regard.

In closing, I would like to recall that the resumed fighting has led to large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons. There are very few facilities available to these people. The situation in the Panjshir Valley, a remote and inaccessible area with insufficient means of subsistence, is especially alarming. Emergency humanitarian relief assistance, particularly food, clothing, medicine and shelter, is in great demand in that area and in many other parts of Afghanistan. We commend the Secretary-General for the coordination of all international efforts to deliver emergency assistance to Afghan people who need it and call upon the international community to spare no efforts in assisting those in need in Afghanistan.

In the light of the foregoing, my delegation has co-sponsored draft resolution A/54/L.58. I wish to place on record our appreciation to the delegation of Germany for the broad and lengthy consultations and coordination it carried out on this draft resolution.

Mr. Kolby (Norway): I would like to begin by paying a special tribute to the Secretary-General for his efforts to find a peaceful solution to the armed conflict in Afghanistan, and to his Special Envoy, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, for his tireless work over the last two years.

Norway has for many years been involved in Afghanistan through our support for various United Nations agencies and through a number of Norwegian and international non-governmental organizations. Norway chaired the second meeting of the Afghanistan donor group in New York in December 1997. Our support for the people of Afghanistan is based on a strong commitment to a negotiated solution to the armed conflict.

We welcome the Secretary-General's report on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security. Though we are deeply saddened by the lack of progress achieved so far, we recognize that, because of its increasing regional and international implications, it is necessary to keep the Afghan conflict high on the international agenda.

As the Secretary-General rightly points out in his report, the military conflict in Afghanistan is the root cause of a wide range of problems, including illegal drug trafficking, human rights abuses, religious extremism, terrorism and a lack of social and economic development. In addition to the disastrous consequences in terms of loss of human life and civilian suffering, the escalation of the military conflict last summer has further aggravated all these problems. Norway is greatly disturbed by the failure of the Afghan parties, in particular the Taliban, to recognize this, and by their lack of willingness to resume negotiations.

It is crucial to find a peaceful solution to the military conflict in Afghanistan. We welcome the peace initiatives taken by non-belligerent Afghan groups, such as the *Loya Jirgah* convened by the former King of Afghanistan in Rome in November.

Norway welcomes the Tashkent Declaration on Fundamental Principles for a Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict in Afghanistan. We regret that the situation has deteriorated since the meeting of the "six plus two" group in Tashkent last summer. We call upon the Afghan parties to implement the many constructive recommendations set out in the Declaration. We also call on the members of the "six plus two" group to adhere to their agreement not to provide military support to any Afghan party and to prevent their respective territories from being used for this purpose.

Once again, we would like to stress the regional dimension of the Afghan conflict. Drug trafficking and other illegal activities are impeding economic development in the whole region. As the world's largest producer of illicit opium, Afghanistan is a threat to stability and prosperity in its neighbouring countries as well. Norway is deeply worried by the reported rapid growth in drug abuse in the region. The social and economic cost of illegal drug trafficking adds to the destructive effects of the military conflict.

We appeal to all countries in the region to join in a common effort to put an end to the illegal traffic of drugs and arms, which is helping prolong the military conflict in Afghanistan. A political settlement of the Afghan conflict would make an important contribution to peace and stability in the whole region.

Norway strongly condemns the violations of human rights that are taking place in Afghanistan, including those inflicted on ethnic minorities, women and girls. We urge the warring factions to respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Norway is particularly alarmed by the violation of women's and children's rights. Education for all, including for girls and women, is the best possible investment in a country's future. We call upon the parties, in particular the Taliban, to promote free access to education, employment and health care for all citizens. Norway strongly denounces the recruitment of child soldiers, and we urge the parties to

respect the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the tenth anniversary of which we celebrated last month.

Norway is alarmed by the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, especially for the large number of internally displaced people. It is crucial to bring an end to the fighting and to ensure safe access for humanitarian organizations. We call for a rapid return of the refugees, and we urge the parties to the conflict to allow relief agencies to provide assistance effectively and efficiently to all victims.

Through the Strategic Framework for Afghanistan, the United Nations has taken into account the interaction between political, humanitarian, human rights and other factors. Norway strongly supports this effort to give humanitarian assistance a place in the political process for peace and reconciliation.

Finally, we reaffirm our commitment to the re-establishment of peace in Afghanistan, and we give our full support to the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan in its efforts to bring about a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

Mr. Granovsky (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Last year's events do not inspire us with hope for an early end to the armed conflict in Afghanistan and for the beginning of serious political dialogue among the major warring Afghan parties. There were certain expectations in connection with the activities of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, and also in connection with contacts between the Afghan sides in Ashgabat and Tashkent.

The adoption of the Tashkent Declaration on Fundamental Principles for Peaceful Settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan by the neighbours and friends of Afghanistan, the "six plus two" group was an important step forward. The States that signed this document urgently called upon the warring parties to renew their peaceful political negotiations with a view to establishing a broadly representative Government for Afghanistan; they expressed their readiness to promote such negotiations under the aegis of the United Nations and to make commitments not to provide military support to any Afghan party whatsoever.

However, only a few days later, the Taliban launched a new offensive. This led to the renewal of large-scale hostilities in Afghanistan and to yet another breakdown in international peace efforts. Hostilities continue to escalate in Afghanistan, because of the Taliban leadership, which embarked upon its policy of force to impose a solution to the Afghan problems. Of special concern is the fact that thousands of non-Afghan students, as well as hundreds of mercenaries and fighters from other countries, continue fighting on the Taliban's side.

We must put an end to the increasing outside interference in intra-Afghan affairs. Neighbours of Afghanistan must strictly comply with the relevant principles set forth in the Tashkent Declaration.

It is no secret that the Taliban-controlled territory in Afghanistan is being used to support international terrorism and extremism of all stripes and to encourage unlawful production of and trafficking in drugs. As a result of the Taliban's activities, Afghanistan has acquired a solid reputation as one of the world's hotbeds of terrorism and drugs, the negative effects of which are already being felt directly far beyond the limits of that country, including in some regions of Russia and the States of Central Asia. All of this directly affects the interests of our security, and we, along with our partners in the Commonwealth of Independent States will continue to take all necessary steps in this connection.

Russia supported Security Council resolution 1267 (1999), which strongly condemned the Taliban for sponsoring international terrorism and demanded that it hand over Usama bin Laden, the international terrorist. In the light of reports of bin Laden's support for terrorist groups on Russian territory, compliance with this resolution takes on special significance for us.

We call upon the international community to lend active support to the activities of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, designed to strengthen the opportunities for States neighbouring Afghanistan to halt the transport or flows of drugs.

In their resolutions, the Security Council and the General Assembly condemned the activities of the Taliban and put forward clear requirements regarding the principles for an Afghan settlement. The main requirement is the holding, under the auspices of the United Nations, of intra-Afghan negotiations designed to establish a broadly representative and multi-ethnic government that would ensure respect for the rights of all Afghans and fulfil Afghanistan's obligation, in accordance with international law, to comply with human rights law and international humanitarian law.

We would like to emphasize that talk of some kind of international recognition of the administration of the Taliban is in direct contradiction of these United Nations demands. The new spiral of fierce armed resistance begun by the Taliban has led to a worsening of the suffering of the Afghan population and to new flagrant violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law.

We demand that the Taliban movement immediately put an end to such practices, ensure the safety of international humanitarian personnel and fulfil other appropriate conditions for the lending of urgent humanitarian assistance by the international community to all of those who are in need of it, without any type of discrimination.

The United Nations, playing the central role in coordinating international efforts in Afghan matters, must take active steps to end the bloodshed and bring the parties to a peaceful settlement. We support the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan, in fulfilment of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

We believe that the members of the "six plus two" group should take practical steps to carry out their obligations and thereby promote the establishment of favourable conditions to break the deadlock in the Afghan crisis. We welcome the latest meeting, which was concluded yesterday in Ottawa, of the Afghanistan Support Group, in which representatives of donor States, including Russia, and a number of international and non-governmental organizations participated. We hope that the results of that meeting will help enhance the effectiveness of international humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.

Russia is prepared to continue constructive cooperation with all interested parties to find a settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan on the basis of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The humanitarian and political situation in Afghanistan continues to be a major source of concern for the international community. Continued fighting between the warring parties has become an unbearable burden for the Afghan people. There is therefore an ever-increasing need for the international community to pay more attention to the daily problems faced by the Afghan people, who aspire only to the bare essentials of life and security.

In this context, I would like to commend the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA) and the specialized agencies for their efforts aimed at alleviating the pain and suffering of the Afghan people. We appeal to all Afghan parties to cooperate with the Mission and to facilitate the work of the specialized agencies and others in providing assistance to the Afghan people.

There is no doubt that the continued fighting has exacerbated and complicated the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons. Furthermore, the warring parties' disregard for international norms and laws in dealing with unarmed civilian inhabitants has contributed to an exacerbation of the situation. This has resulted in waves of migration, sometimes voluntary and sometimes forced. People are migrating from their places of origin, thus complicating and worsening the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. We therefore believe that there is an urgent need to find a prompt solution to the refugee problem in order to enable the refugees to return voluntarily to their homelands and to provide them with the necessary living conditions.

Egypt would like to express its concern over the content of the report of the Secretary-General with regard to the possibility of an acute food shortage in Afghanistan next year. We urge the parties to the conflict that are taking intransigent positions as regards establishing a dialogue with the other parties to realize the gravity of the catastrophe facing the Afghan people and to demonstrate a sense of responsibility towards their people by overcoming their narrow interests and by taking immediate steps towards a peaceful settlement of the conflict in good faith and honesty.

Policies that breed terrorism and that support and encourage the production of drugs to finance the war machine have also become a major concern for the international community. There is no doubt that Security Council resolution 1267 (1999) and the presidential statement issued by the Council on 22 October 1999 constituted two very clear messages to the party in power: that it should realize the gravity of the situation and take into consideration the international community's great concern.

The Islamic world began the holy month of Ramadan yesterday, a month that calls for tolerance and the resolution of conflicts. I would like to take this opportunity to launch an appeal to the party that is contributing to the deterioration of the situation to cling

to the genuine pillars of Islam, a religion that calls for equality among people — both men and women — and for putting an end to bloodshed and living in social interdependence. We urge all intransigent parties to refrain from any practices that fail to do justice to this holy religion, which has always called for peace and dialogue.

Mr. Haque (Pakistan): Twenty years ago, in the month of December, Afghanistan was invaded by the forces of the former Soviet Union. Since that fateful day, Afghanistan and its suffering people have continued to be traumatized by war and conflict. The year 1989 was a watershed year in Afghanistan's history. Soviet forces withdrew and left behind a totally ravaged country. With the departure of foreign forces from their country, the Afghan people expected peace and the reconstruction of their shattered infrastructure, economy and lives. At a time when the Afghan need for external help and assistance in the rebuilding of the country was the greatest, the international community quickly disengaged itself. It ignored the people who had made great sacrifices to preserve their independence and sovereignty and who were just emerging from the ashes of a fierce, decade-long battle against foreign occupation. The conflict that rages in Afghanistan today is in large measure a direct consequence of that neglect, which continues to this day. As the Secretary-General has noted in his report, the response of the international community to the 1999 consolidated appeal for assistance to Afghanistan has been disappointing.

The effects of the two decades of conflict in Afghanistan have been truly devastating. Death and destruction have visited almost every Afghan household. Millions continue to live as refugees in foreign lands. The Afghan economy is in shambles, cities and towns have been reduced to rubble, the countryside has been ravaged, and institutional and State structures have been destroyed.

Tragically for the people of Afghanistan, the period covered in the report of the Secretary-General has not been much different from yesteryear's. Some brief flickers of hope were kindled, but were quickly stamped out by violent spells of internecine strife.

The two rounds of intra-Afghan talks in Ashkabad, held in February and April this year, enabled the two main parties to reach a framework agreement. However, unfortunately, the hopes generated by this process were soon dashed by mutual accusations and recriminations between the two warring sides, and the agreement fell by the wayside.

On 19 and 20 July, the "six plus two" group met in Tashkent. It was the first time that the group also met the two Afghan sides. The meeting adopted the Tashkent Declaration on Fundamental Principles for a Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict in Afghanistan.

The Declaration envisaged a two-stage process for the peaceful settlement of the conflict. In the immediate term, the Afghan parties were to be encouraged to adopt measures for building mutual confidence, including a ceasefire and direct negotiations on the exchange of prisoners of war and the lifting of internal blockades to promote reciprocal trade and the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The second stage called for the Afghans to draw up basic principles for the future States structures in Afghanistan and the establishment of a broad-based, multi-ethnic and fully representative Government.

The members of the "six plus two" collectively undertook not to provide military support to any Afghan party and to prevent the use of their territories for such purposes. A similar call was issued to the international community, including the adoption of measures to prevent the delivery of weapons to Afghanistan. Unfortunately, almost immediately after the Tashkent meeting, the deeply entrenched mutual suspicions between the two main Afghan parties led to a new round of hostilities, which began with rocket attacks on 27 July on Kabul by the United Front and a ground offensive by the Taliban forces the next day.

In response to an appeal by Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, Pakistan undertook the initiative to facilitate reconciliation between the two Afghan parties. As a facilitator, Pakistan merely undertook to faithfully convey the views of the two sides to each other. A number of meetings were held with both sides, but the initiative did not succeed because of the contradictions in the private views and public pronouncements of the representatives of the United Front as well as their excessive demands, which were not acceptable to the Taliban.

The latest round of hostilities now appears to have run out of steam. It is our sincere hope that during the intervening period between now and next spring, the two sides will realize the futility of conflict and the wisdom of rebuilding an Afghanistan at peace with itself.

We believe that an end to outside interference in Afghanistan would help to promote the prospects of peace and an intra-Afghan dialogue. Pakistan has proposed on a number of occasions the imposition of an arms embargo

applicable to the whole of Afghanistan. An embargo on military supplies would greatly reduce the ability of the Afghan factions to continue to wage their self-destructive war. We will continue to work for this objective.

However, we believe that the arms embargo must also be accompanied by a comprehensive international programme for the reconstruction of Afghanistan and the rehabilitation of the Afghan refugees. The economic reconstruction of Afghanistan would strengthen and reinforce the impulses for peace and stability in that country.

The continuation of war in Afghanistan has direct and dire consequences for Pakistan, since our countries share a border that extends over 2,500 kilometres. Pakistan cannot isolate itself from the fallout of the conflict in Afghanistan. The influx of millions of Afghan refugees to Pakistan has imposed heavy social and economic costs on Pakistan. While the overall size of the Afghan refugee population in Pakistan has ebbed and flowed, approximately 1.8 million refugees remain in Pakistan even today. They represent the largest concentration of refugees in any part of the world.

Pakistan has no option but to deal as best it can with the ground realities in Afghanistan, particularly the fact that the Taliban government controls 90 per cent of the territory, including the capital, Kabul. Our problems as a neighbour of Afghanistan are different from the ones of those who find it easy to prescribe panaceas, offer advice or make demands from afar.

No country in the world stands to gain more than Pakistan from the return of peace and stability to Afghanistan. Accordingly, our policy towards Afghanistan is predicated on a desire to promote a peaceful solution to the Afghan conflict.

We have fully supported the efforts of the United Nations as well as the initiatives of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in the shared belief that there can only be a negotiated solution to Afghanistan. We are convinced also that only an intra-Afghan consensus can ensure durable peace in Afghanistan. There can be no solution imposed from outside. That is an immutable lesson of Afghan history.

The key to peace in Afghanistan lies in the engagement of both Afghan parties and not in the isolation of one or the other. The international community must remain neutral between the parties for it to remain a credible interlocutor. To demonize one side would be counterproductive. It is through impartiality that the international community can hope to bring durable peace to Afghanistan. It is not possible, nor would it be fair, to single out any one Afghan party and hold it responsible for the cumulative ills of the last 20 years in Afghanistan.

It must not be forgotten that in the intervening period between the end of foreign occupation of Afghanistan and the advent of the Taliban movement, the very factions that now form the United Front were at war among themselves as well as against other Afghan groups. The Taliban emerged only a few years back, as a reaction to the excesses of the Afghan warlords. As such, the blame for the disaster in Afghanistan cannot be laid at the door of the Taliban, to the exclusion of those who preceded them.

Pakistan believes that the "six plus two" group can, and must, play its role in finding a durable solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. We do not share the doubts expressed by some about the effectiveness of that group. The Tashkent Declaration was a clear manifestation of the agreement of the group on the steps to be taken for the return of peace to Afghanistan. Furthermore, while we appreciate the decision of the Secretary-General to strengthen and upgrade the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan, we regret that the work of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General has been frozen, at his own request. We believe that the United Nations, the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy must continue their efforts to promote peace in Afghanistan. The international community must remain engaged and utilize to the maximum the window of opportunity presented by the onset of winter for the promotion of negotiations between the warring parties.

I would now briefly like to comment on the draft resolution contained in document A/54/L.58, which was presented to the General Assembly earlier this afternoon. We proposed a number of constructive amendments to inject some balance into the text. A few of our proposals were accepted; most were not. In our view, the draft resolution, as submitted, remains one-sided and biased. Pakistan does not condone excesses by any party to the conflict in Afghanistan. However, we note that the draft resolution holds the Taliban primarily responsible for most, if not all aspects of the Afghan situation. It ignores some constructive steps on the part of the Taliban, whether they relate to the destruction of heroin laboratories, to the successful crop substitution efforts under the pilot programme of the United Nations

International Drug Control Programme or to improvements, howsoever limited, in education and health care for women and girls. It does not acknowledge that large areas under the control of the Taliban are relatively stable and secure, which could encourage the voluntary return of refugees, provided international assistance is forthcoming.

We also note that the Secretary-General has announced his intention to progressively move the head office of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan to Kabul. Obviously, such a decision is predicated on improved and more secure conditions in areas controlled by the Taliban Government. The draft resolution also eschews any criticism of the United Front, whether in relation to external military support, human rights excesses, violations of international humanitarian law, drug trafficking, the use of anti-personnel landmines or other issues. Above all, the draft resolution sends out the wrong message to the two main Afghan parties currently locked in battle.

The one-sided nature of the text would strengthen the belief among the Taliban that they are discriminated against unfairly by the United Nations. It would also encourage the United Front to raise its expectations and demands, secure in the belief that it enjoys the support of powerful countries. This would militate against and complicate the prospects of negotiations for peace between the Afghan parties. Due to these serious shortcomings, Pakistan has decided to dissociate itself from the draft resolution in document A/54/L.58, being considered by the General Assembly.

Mr. Vohidov (Uzbekistan) (*spoke in Russian*): Allow me at the outset to express our gratitude to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his annual report on the situation in Afghanistan, in which he sheds light on the events that have taken place in Afghanistan over the past year in the military, political and humanitarian spheres, and also sets out his views of further ways and means of considering and resolving the Afghan problem. We believe that the report as a whole served as a good basis for drawing up the draft resolution submitted for our consideration today.

It is clear that the many years of conflict in Afghanistan have been a source of pain not only to the Afghan people, but also to the peoples of Central and South Asia, as well as to the rest of the international community. The long-lasting civil war and the continued instability have long since crossed the border of Afghanistan and spread their negative effects far beyond the region. The international community cannot fail to express its concern over what is taking place today in that long-suffering country and its vicinity.

The terrible consequences of the civil war in Afghanistan include constant violations of human rights and freedoms, the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of peaceful inhabitants, the dangerous spread of the trade in drugs and arms, the growing threat of international terrorism, regional extremism and the radicalization of the peaceful, humanistic and lofty character of one of the world's major religions, Islam. These phenomena are taking on increasingly negative forms, and the victims are the completely innocent inhabitants of the States Members of the United Nations.

The item under consideration in the General Assembly today has been on its agenda for almost 20 years, since 1980. Once again, the international community must express its concern about the fate of that country, and all its peoples and ethnic groups, and about the fact that war and conflict have deprived its people of their homeland, doomed it to destruction and deprivation, reversed its economic development and lowered standards of living for decades to come. For Uzbekistan, which has a common border with Afghanistan, this issue is of special concern and very timely. The re-establishment in Central Asia of new, independent States with significant human and natural resources has resulted in the creation of a new geopolitical region that, with further consistent progress, might be transformed into one of the dynamically developing markets of the world in the twenty-first century. However, the success of such an important development will depend to a significant extent on ensuring a peaceful settlement of the Afghan conflict and establishing lasting peace, security and stability throughout the region.

The rapid achievement of a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan, to which there can be no alternative, would give a powerful impetus to the establishment of conditions necessary for ensuring mutually advantageous regional cooperation among all the countries of the region. Uzbekistan therefore believes that is extremely important for Afghanistan to become a peaceful, stable and secure State with a strong, authoritative, multi-ethnic, broad-based and representative government that is capable of achieving national consensus and ensuring internal stability, respect for the norms of international law and good-neighbourly relations with neighbouring countries.

In recent years, the Republic of Uzbekistan has consistently made efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Afghan problem with the specific intention of strengthening regional stability and security. Such aspirations determined the constructive approach taken by my country, within the framework of the "six plus two" group, in carrying out under the auspices of the United Nations its activities to seek ways and means of finding a political settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan.

I should like to note that, despite some recent criticism of a lack of success in the activities of the "six plus two" group, the group has in a relatively short time gained experience, in cooperation with other interested countries, in seeking ways to break the deadlock in the Afghan crisis. Since its inception the group has shown itself to be an effective international mechanism with enormous potential for achieving a peaceful solution to the Afghan problem. In our view, this potential was visible also in the high-level meeting of the "six plus two" group held on 19 and 20 July 1999 at Tashkent, with the participation of the Afghan sides, and in the adoption of the Tashkent Declaration on Fundamental Principles for a Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict in Afghanistan. Judging from the reaction of the international community, that Declaration and the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions are viewed as the principal international documents relating to a peaceful long-term settlement of the Afghan conflict.

To achieve effective results, the members of the group must display the necessary political will in fulfilling their commitments under the Tashkent Declaration, as repeatedly urged by the international community at large. Here, it is important too that the Afghan parties should heed the views of the international community and take a genuinely positive and constructive approach to a peaceful settlement of the Afghan conflict. Settlement of the Afghan conflict is a matter first and foremost for the Afghans themselves. All parties to the Afghan conflict, including the forces backing them, must realize that, even more than in the past, there can be no military solution now or in the future.

In our view, the only way out of the situation is to bring about an immediate end to hostilities, a ceasefire, and a resumption of dialogue among the Afghan sides with a view to beginning a negotiating process, under United Nations auspices, intended to achieve lasting peace and stability.

Uzbekistan is convinced that the United Nations, as a generally acknowledged neutral mediator, must continue to play a central role in all international efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement of the Afghan conflict. In that connection, we welcome and support the efforts made by the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and by the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan. We place high value too on the endeavours of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, who in recent years has devoted himself to active peace negotiations with a view to achieving a peaceful settlement of the Afghan problem. We firmly call upon the Afghan parties to cooperate constructively and positively with the Special Envoy's peacemaking efforts; that would enable him to fulfil his mandate more effectively.

The most important elements of Uzbekistan's foreign policy relating to the peaceful settlement of the Afghan conflict are the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan and the maintenance of its sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence and national unity. While Uzbekistan's policy upholds the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, we intend vigorously to support United Nations initiatives to break the deadlock in the Afghan problem, to cooperate actively with all interested parties in bringing peace to that country, and to support contacts with the Afghan parties to the conflict.

We are gravely concerned also about other aspects of the inter-Afghan crisis. The use of Afghan territory for training international terrorists and extremists and for conducting planning and training for terrorist acts has a highly destabilizing effect throughout the region, and particularly in Central Asia. In that connection, we sharply condemn all activities of terrorist and extremist groups in Afghanistan aimed against the interests of States Members of the United Nations and of their citizens. We welcome and support all General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on this matter. In that connection, Uzbekistan fully supports Security Council resolution 1267 (1999) of 15 October 1999.

Nor can we fail to be gravely concerned also about the establishment on Afghan territory of major drug production centres. These harmful substances are increasingly spreading to neighbouring countries and to other regions and subject their vulnerable societies to the most nefarious influences. According to the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, illegal production of opium in Afghanistan doubled between 1998 and 1999, to 4,600 metric tonnes. The illegal drug trade, which is usually coupled with arms

trafficking and other criminal activities, poses a serious threat to the entire region. We are concerned about this and call upon the Afghan parties to put an immediate end to all unlawful activities in this sphere; we support the efforts of the international community and of international organizations, in particular the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, to put an end to the illegal production of narcotic drugs in Afghanistan.

It would be in everyone's interest to enter the twenty-first century having done away with the blights on our planet, first and foremost the armed conflicts that daily cost many thousands of innocent lives. On the threshold of the new millennium, we must face an urgent challenge, to which the world community has been giving its most focused attention: to make effective progress in the peace process in Afghanistan and to put an early end to the many years of destructive war there. Uzbekistan intends to play a most active role in international efforts to that end.

Based on that position of principle Uzbekistan has joined in sponsoring the draft resolution before the Assembly today.

Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan): In discussing the draft resolution now before us, my delegation would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report of 16 November 1999 on the situation in Afghanistan (A/54/536). The report for the first time takes a new approach to determining, *inter alia*, the extent of foreign military involvement in Afghanistan, particularly in comparison with previous reports, and it explicitly asserts the existence of foreign military units. The amply documented facts contained in the report enable the international community to cross-check the realities about the now-revealed agenda of both Pakistan and its mercenaries, the Taliban, in Afghanistan and in the region.

By the same token, the report highlights important facts relating to the existence of international terrorist networks operating from the region and beyond in collaboration with the Taliban militia, the colossal increase in opium production in the Taliban-held areas of Afghanistan and, finally, the persistent threat to international peace and security posed by the talibanization of the region. In addition, the report amply reflects the Taliban's gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. In addition, the report amply reflects the Taliban's gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Before addressing certain specific aspects of this report, I feel obliged to remind this Assembly of the Islamic State of Afghanistan's continued projection of the far-reaching ominous repercussions emanating from Talibanism, since as early as 1995. There were early warnings of the imminent threat of Talibanism, including its profound links to the extremist and terrorist networks of the region and beyond, its close collaboration with the politico-military drug mafia of Pakistan and its politico-ideological agenda in South and Central Asia, all of which constitute a major threat to the peace and stability of the region and the world.

Regrettably, despite these early warnings, the initial rise of the Taliban was galvanized by short-sighted views coming from certain countries in the region and beyond. These countries aimed at capitalizing on the Taliban for their own strategic and mercantilistic interests, without an in-depth analysis of crucial realities such as the geopolitical situation of Afghanistan, the significance of its not being allied with any regional country, its desire not to be subservient to any country, the ethnic composition of its people and their resolve not to succumb to any foreign domination.

Allow me to highlight by category certain main points of the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan (A/54/536).

First, on foreign intervention and the existence of foreign military units in Afghanistan: references to the existence of non-Afghan combatants arriving from Pakistan are made in paragraphs 5, 33, 35 and 75 of the report. Paragraph 75 in addition confirms the involvement of Pakistani fighters in the combat against the armed forces of the Islamic State of Afghanistan, reading:

> "Equally alarming and unacceptable is the growing presence of thousands of foreign 'volunteers', mainly on the side of the Taliban. Those non-Afghan fighters, some still children under the age of 14, come mostly from religious schools in Pakistan. Reports indicate that there are also independent units of Arab and other non-Afghan fighters who are fighting along with the Taliban troops, but under separate commands. It is deeply disturbing that an increasing number of non-Afghan fighters are taking part in the actual combat, as well as the planning and logistical support of military offensives."

While we thank the Secretary-General for having rightly included in his report the crucial factor of the existence of Pakistani and other foreign fighters in Afghanistan, the Islamic State of Afghanistan expects the Security Council to identify the Pakistani aggression in Afghanistan and to call upon that country to withdraw its so-called volunteers and its military personnel from Afghanistan, as it did earlier this year from Kargil, in the interest of peace and stability in the region.

On the unilateral withdrawal of the Taliban militia from the United Nations-sponsored Ashgabat peace talks, their total disregard of the Tashkent "six plus two" meeting and the summer Pakistani-Taliban offensive, paragraphs 10 to 17 of the report of the Secretary-General refer to the three rounds of intra-Afghan talks brought about through the discreet efforts of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan and certain neighbouring countries during the year. Two successive rounds of these talks took place in Ashgabat, 10-11 February and 11-14 March 1999. However, on 10 April, the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, issued a statement calling for a unilateral suspension of the talks by the Taliban. Subsequent diplomatic efforts to bring the Taliban back to the negotiating table proved futile.

On 19 July of this year, at the invitation of the Government of Uzbekistan, member States of the "six plus two" group met in Tashkent and adopted the Declaration on Fundamental Principles for a Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict in Afghanistan, known as the Tashkent Declaration. The Declaration made strong appeals to both sides to refrain from initiating any major new military offensives, as simultaneously called for by Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Afghanistan.

The appeals met with belligerent contempt from the Taliban troops, who, accompanied by armed Pakistani and Arab fighters, soon thereafter launched a major military offensive north of Kabul. Putting this major offensive in perspective, paragraph 4 of the Secretary-General's report reads,

> "The level of fighting reached an unprecedented scale for 1999 when the Taliban launched a major ground and air offensive against UF on 28 July. The offensive, which Taliban leaders called a decisive battle to defeat UF, not only shattered the hopes for peace raised at the Tashkent meeting of the 'Six plus Two' group, but also added further problems to the already grave humanitarian and human rights situations on the ground."

Significant, however, is the fact that the relen last-ditch attempt by the Secretary-General's Spe Envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, aimed at averting this m offensive through the influence that Pakistan maintain the mercenary group, as referred to in paragraph 3 the report, yielded no tangible results.

Remaining incontrovertibly convinced of the mas and direct involvement of Pakistan in the fighting, an the evolution of the military events throughout the have grown more and more revealing to the internati community, the Islamic State of Afghanistan sees the offensive as a Pakistani offensive against the sovereig independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan

Pakistan's acts of aggression in Afghanistan req clear and resolute action by the United Nations. Islamic State of Afghanistan is of the conviction mere rhetoric and adopting policies of appeasem towards the aggressor will do nothing but fur embolden the aggressor. It is, we believe, high time the United Nations to take strong measures against aggressor in the case of Afghanistan, thereby uphol the sacred purpose of the maintenance of internati peace and security and sparing the lives of inno people who are victims of years of foreign intervent

As regards the grave breaches of internati humanitarian law and human rights by the Taliban: w today marks the fifty-first anniversary of the Unive Declaration of Human Rights, and we are on the verg the twenty-first century and of the next millennium, dismaying to see the Taliban championing the caus human rights violations and of breaches of internati humanitarian law.

Paragraphs 58 to 62 of the report explain Taliban's massive and gross human rights violati which have continued unabated throughout the year. report reflects the widespread suffering and the m miseries the people of Afghanistan have continued t subjected to by the Taliban militia during this past y whose acts have included deliberate targeting of civil and non-combatants, summary execution of women children, forced displacement of civilians, arbit detention, the separation of families and women f their menfolk, the abduction of children and women, looting and burning of their houses and the system destruction of their entire agricultural infrastructure.

In this regard, the Pakistani daily, *The Frontier Post*, on 6 December — just four days ago — published an article by a Pakistani commentator in which he said,

> "They [the Taliban] could not establish well-recognized norms of governance which should have been acceptable ... within or outside Afghanistan. Their mode of governance has practically disabled the Afghans to shape their own future and pushed Afghanistan [into] the backyard of the underdeveloped world ... Summary executions, separation of men from families, arbitrary detentions, abduction and disappearance of women, burning and destruction of homes and property, including chopping of trees, are reported to be common."

The Frontier Post continues,

> "Such lawlessness can only destabilize a society to a state of [no] return. Such [a] state of affairs demands that human rights issues of the people of Afghanistan should be addressed on [a] priority basis by the international community. A meaningful advance can be made only if a government representing all ethnic groups is established as a first step."

The commentator, Mr. M. S. Qazi, then writes that vis-à-vis the Taliban, "a review of Pakistan's foreign policy objectives is essential".

The conditions described above by the Secretary-General and the Pakistani commentator draw a picture of the realities in the Taliban-held Afghan areas. Unfortunately, despite these realities many Pakistani statesmen and officials flaunt the grandeur of their relations with the Taliban, claiming that the Taliban have restored peace and normalcy in many parts of Afghanistan. The reality in the Taliban-held Afghan areas is that there has been a de facto military occupation by Pakistan, by which more than half of the nation has been placed under virtual house arrest, gender apartheid instituted in the form of the most misogynistic regime, all international laws and norms continuously breached, terrorism publicly sponsored, other countries threatened and the largest quantity of illicit opium in the world produced.

There is also a flip side to the Pakistani interpretation of the realities in the Taliban-held Afghan areas. In fact, in virtually all Taliban-held territories of Afghanistan there are varying degrees of resistance against the Taliban and their Pakistani mentor. Naturally, the resistance is aimed at breaking their firm military grip.

While we are thankful to the Secretary-General for his tragic picture of the atrocities — all of which were committed against civilians by the Taliban — the Islamic State of Afghanistan further expects the Secretary-General to invite the Security Council to pay due attention to this alarming situation and to the significant suffering of the Afghan people. Given the situation, there is a dire need to take the necessary measures against the perpetrators. Failure to act vigorously against such crimes, we believe, would undoubtedly lead to a sense of unaccountability and impunity for those involved in the heinous crimes enumerated by the Secretary-General.

Regarding the massive production of narcotics by the Taliban militia, the world's largest illicit supplier of opium, the United Nations International Drug Control Programme testified earlier this year that more than 96 per cent of Afghan opium — a quantity estimated at 4,600 metric tons and with an end value of $100 billion — comes from areas under the control of the Taliban.

My delegation spoke last year from this very rostrum about the evil triangle that is haunting our region. The evil triangle we seek to reveal is between, first, the politico-military mafia of Pakistan; secondly, branches of international terrorism and drug traffickers operating from the region; and thirdly, the notorious Taliban militia.

Combating such a transnational organized crime network, which finances the hegemonic purposes of Pakistan and the Taliban's war machine, in addition to associated terrorist groups, demands firm and robust action by the international community and the countries of the region. Mere reports that only establish facts without making an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon and recommendations for a concerted strategy to combat the problem are not enough to advance the struggle against illicit drug trafficking.

As regards the Security Council's sanctions against the Taliban, one of the major political developments within the framework of the United Nations is resolution 1267 (1999), unanimously adopted on 15 October 1999. As is explained by the Secretary-General in paragraph 22 of his report, the Security Council resolution imposing sanctions on the Taliban was to become effective unless the Taliban turned over Mr. bin Laden within 30 days from the date of the resolution's adoption. Given the lack of resolve by the Taliban to comply with the demand, the sanctions came into effect on 14 November 1999.

In this context, we have welcomed the clause on humanitarian exceptions, which would ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people who are innocent, irrespective of their geographical location. The main objective of the sanctions is to curtail the financial resources of the Taliban and their money-laundering operations, which come mainly from the proceeds of drug trafficking and donations from their rich and wrong-headed overseas sympathizers.

However, ample amounts of commentary and criticism from different Afghan circles, expressing their disappointment over the formulation and limited nature of the resolution, which is understood to be mainly focused on the extradition of only one individual, continue to raise many questions. They clearly construe this resolution to indicate that all breaches of the peace and violations of international law as enshrined in the Charter, including interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign State and the perpetration of heinous crimes by non-Afghan combatants, including Pakistani military personnel and armed "volunteers", as well as the Taliban militia, shall go unpunished. They interpret the Security Council resolution, in fact, as giving them a green light to engage in a scorched-earth policy, to openly pursue the looting and torching of houses, and to commit crimes against humanity, war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law. Many eyebrows have been raised about the resolution and questions raised about the strange attitude of indifference towards the Pakistani aggression, the continued crimes of armed Pakistani and Taliban men and the double standard of the Security Council towards the principles of equality of States and the disposition of the United Nations Charter, set forth in its Preamble as the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.

Yet, in order to protect life, liberty and security and to end the significant suffering of any human person threatened by aggression and terrorism — whether living inside or outside Taliban-held territories — it is necessary that the scope of the sanctions imposed under the resolution not be limited solely to extraditing Bin Laden from Afghanistan.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan has always supported the efforts of Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Afghanistan, as well as of the United Nations Special Mission in Afghanistan in their dedicated and tireless endeavours to bring a lasting peace to Afghanistan. We are thankful to the Secretary-General for acknowledging and welcoming the willingness of the Islamic State of Afghanistan to talk with the Taliban in order to reach a solution to the Afghanistan problem.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan — mindful of the principle of the peaceful settlement of conflicts — earnestly desires a broad-based, fully representative and multi-ethnic Government in Afghanistan. The Islamic State of Afghanistan, struggling for sovereignty and the return of peace and normalcy through the institution of such a Government, highly aspires to the settlement of fundamental issues, such as the restoration and full observance of human rights in Afghanistan, particularly women's and girls' human rights. The Islamic State of Afghanistan is of the firm conviction that the reconstruction and cultural and economic development of Afghanistan can never be totally or effectively possible if Afghan women are deprived of their God-given rights to public education and to work.

The people of the Islamic State of Afghanistan genuinely aspire to an early return of peace and normalcy, hoping Afghanistan will be not merely a neighbour of, but also a potential friend to all neighbouring and regional countries, including Pakistan. Afghanistan would extend full trade cooperation, such as the facilitation of north-south and east-west transit routes, to the benefit of all countries of the region and beyond. The Islamic State of Afghanistan is striving for the restoration of friendly relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan based on the equality of sovereign States and contingent on the continuity of mutual respect.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan, by co-sponsoring the draft resolution before us, once again reaffirms its position that there is no military solution to the current conflict in Afghanistan.

I would like to conclude by expressing my delegation's sincere gratitude and thanks to the German delegation and Ambassador Kastrup for their untiring and strenuous efforts in coordinating the work on the draft resolution on Afghanistan. I would like also to extend my appreciation to all the numerous delegations that have sponsored the draft resolution. We rest assured that, as is its established practice, the General Assembly will adopt the draft resolution, which is sponsored by more than 80 countries, without a vote.

I wish to say one last word. In his statement, the representative of Pakistan spoke just now of Pakistan's peacemaking efforts and good offices among the Taliban parties. In reality, all Pakistan's efforts, which it claims

to be the work of facilitation, are focused on confusing world public opinion about its military involvement in Afghanistan. This is now a well-known fact, widely reported by the Secretary-General in his recent report on the situation in Afghanistan. The only service that can be provided by Pakistan in the interests of peace and stability in the region is to withdraw its military personnel and so-called "volunteers" from Afghanistan. All armed Pakistanis have to leave Afghanistan. Pakistan is directly involved in the Afghanistan conflict and cannot be a peace-broker in Afghanistan.

The main purpose of the Pakistani emissary's visit to the North to make diplomatic contact was to urge the Islamic State of Afghanistan to accept the so-called "emirate" of the Taliban and thus to surrender to the Taliban. This absurd demand was, of course, categorically rejected. Pakistan is earnestly asked to evacuate the armed Pakistanis from Afghanistan. This would be a service that Pakistan could render to the peace process in Afghanistan.

The Acting President: I should like to inform members that, in order to allow time for the review of the programme budget implications of draft resolution A/54/L.58, action on the draft resolution will be taken at a later date to be announced.

The meeting rose at 7.25 p.m.

United Nations A/54/PV.79

General Assembly

Official Records

Fifty-fourth session

79th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 15 December 1999, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Tribute to the memory of Franjo Tudjman, President of the Republic of Croatia

The President: Before taking up the items on our agenda, it is my sad duty to pay tribute to the memory of the late President of the Republic of Croatia, His Excellency Mr. Franjo Tudjman, who passed away on Friday, 10 December 1999. On behalf of the General Assembly, I request the representative of Croatia to convey our condolences to the Government and the people of Croatia and to the bereaved family of Mr. Tudjman. I invite representatives to stand and observe a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of Mr. Franjo Tudjman.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silence.

The President: I call on the representative of Cameroon, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon)(*spoke in French*): It is my sad privilege to associate myself, on behalf of the Group of African States, with the tribute being paid by the peoples of the United Nations to Mr. Franjo Tudjman, President of the Republic of Croatia, whose heart stopped beating on the night of 10 December 1999. The permanent missions of the African States extend their most heartfelt condolences and express their profound sympathy to the Permanent Mission of Croatia, to the family of the deceased and to all the Croatian people.

We do not have an eternal city here on Earth. The Apostle to the Gentiles has warned us it is so. Human life is indeed ephemeral. Nonetheless, certain lives are eternal — those who live on in the memories of human beings, who have stood out because of their brilliant and constructive actions.

Mr. Franjo Tudjman's life was one of these. He was a man of science and culture. He has left to posterity many works on contemporary history, international relations and military arts. A man of conviction and commitment, he gained renown very early on during the Second World War in the struggle for independence of his country. History will remember him as he was — the creator of the Croat nation, the father of independence of Croatia and the first President of his country. His people cannot conceal their distress or their anguish.

May the seeds that were sown germinate and fulfil the hopes of all the Croatian people. It is up to the people of Croatia to complete the work begun by pursuing his determined march on the road of democracy — in other words, on the road of peace, harmony and prosperity. The Croatian people have the capacity to accomplish that — they have the means, and they have the determination.

The President: I invite the representative of Bangladesh, to speak on behalf of the Asian States.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): Bangladesh, as the Chair of the Asian Group for this month, is honoured to

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join the nations of the world in paying our tribute to the departed leader of Croatia. The world has lost an astute leader with the death of President Franjo Tudjman. President Tudjman will be admired as an ardent defender of democracy and the right of the people.

He was a far-sighted statesman who heralded dynamic changes, not only in his country, but also in the region. His untiring efforts and statesmanship earned him the respect of a world leader. He changed the image of his country from a war-ravaged one to a peace-loving, progressive country. Throughout his life, President Tudjman made a tremendous contribution to his country in the consolidation of democracy and establishment of the rights of the people of his country. He had to embrace imprisonment several times to defend these ideals. He was barred from travelling abroad. However, a man of his genius can never be stopped.

Mr. Tudjman's life is a glowing tribute to that universal assertion. He was recognized by his people as their leader, and they made him the President of Croatia in 1990.

Mr. Tudjman will be remembered as the architect of Croatia. Under the most difficult times of his nation, he did not give up hope, and, in the end, he successfully steered his country out of danger towards prosperity and peace.

On behalf of the Asian Group, Bangladesh extends heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family of Mr. Tudjman and to the Government and the people of Croatia for the loss of their leader.

The President: I now call on the representative of the Czech Republic, speaking on behalf of the Eastern European States.

Mr. Galuska (Czech Republic): On behalf of the Member States of the Eastern European Group, I would like to express our sincere condolences to the people and the Government of Croatia on the passing away of President Franjo Tudjman. We would like to extend our sympathy also to the members of the family, to friends and collaborators of the first President of the Republic of Croatia and, indeed, to the whole Croatian nation in grief.

President Tudjman lived a life of courage and devotion to his nation and its cause. He lived with dignity through the trials and tribulations which had visited upon his nation and the whole region in the last seven decades. From the anti-fascist struggles of the Second World War, through the academic accomplishments and later the descent into political imprisonment, he steadfastly followed his vision, which ultimately brought independence to Croatia.

President Tudjman symbolized modern Croatia and steered its course in the last decade. An important chapter in this region's history is coming to an end with this fighter, scholar and politician.

As his legacy, we would like to wish Croatia every success in the continued building of a democratic, peaceful and prosperous European nation. At this moment of mourning, we stand with the Croats, and we pay our respect and tribute.

The President: I now call on the representative of Saint Lucia, speaking on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Hunte (Saint Lucia): I have the honour to make this statement of behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group in tribute to the late Mr. Franjo Tudjman, President of the Republic of Croatia.

Mr. Franjo Tudjman, born to humble beginnings in Veliko, Trgovišaee, a village in the Croatian Zagorje, on 14 May 1922, lived a life based on the purest moral conviction of liberal democracy, and peace. A selfless man, he devoted himself to the relentless pursuit of truth and the liberation of his people. Realizing that goal, Mr. Tudjman was rewarded with the greatest honour and responsibility he could have envisioned — Croatia's vote of confidence in the 1991 free elections.

Mr. Tudjman has earned himself an indelible place of honour in the hearts and minds of the world as a learned scholar and author, activist, military general, statesman and humanitarian. Conviction, truth, honour and the unyielding need to stand for that which is right should shine brightly as the beacon for which we should define our goals and activities in the hallowed halls of this great institution where we honour him today.

His name has through the years become synonymous with conviction and honour. These two inescapable tenets of his life were apparent from the tender age of 19, when he became involved in the national democratic movement. He survived the Nazi scourge, the reign of terror, the indignity of being stripped of his inalienable human rights, suffocation and a horrid repression

perpetrated by those who called themselves Communists. Left in the world without a mother at nine, the example of his father and brother example formed his development into the man he became.

He endured jail sentences when he spoke out against the repression his countrymen suffered. His stance on nationalism and history were punctuated with an unmatched candour which the world and the propaganda machinery were unwilling to tolerate. His conviction was always the proverbial thorn in the side that got him into trouble with those who would have him either quiet or dead. But as the wise adage says, "That which is worth having is worth fighting for". I believe Mr. Tudjman would have agreed that the suffering he endured is nothing compared with the good his life has afforded the people of Croatia. The Croatian Democratic Union under his guidance spearheaded the drive for democracy and independence for Croatia and, under his able leadership, secured an impressive mandate for reform.

The world as we know it today, though riddled with problems and injustices, is blessed ever so often with individuals of the calibre of His Excellency the late Mr. Franjo Tudjman. On behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean States I extend condolences to his family and to the Government and people of Croatia. May his soul rest in peace.

The President: I now call on the representative of Luxembourg to speak on behalf of the Western European and other States.

Mr. Wurth (Luxembourg) *(spoke in French)*: We meet here in sad circumstances. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States to convey our condolences to the people of Croatia and, more particularly, to the members of the Permanent Mission of Croatia to the United Nations.

The head of State of the Republic of Croatia has passed away. This Assembly, which brings together the peoples of the world, is today conveying its feelings of sympathy to the Croatian people. The late President launched the movement towards independence and towards the integration of his country into the community of nations and, more especially, into our Organization.

A leader who has shouldered this role in the history of his country occupies, and will continue to occupy, a pre-eminent place in the heart and the memory of his people. They will always be profoundly grateful to him.

His strong personality has left its imprint on the tumultuous events in the region that has known war and tragedy. After the end of the conflict President Tudjman worked hard to build a republic whose citizens leave no doubt as to their great hope to become part of the vast family of the States of Europe and their wish to share the values and life which are their own, at the dawn of the new millennium.

Franjo Tudjman was President when this journey began, but he left his countrymen without being able to see the full success of their efforts. We are confident that they will move forward with assurance in developing partnership at the regional and international levels.

We share the pain of the people of Croatia at the loss of their President, and our country and this entire Assembly stand by them and assure them of our willingness to cooperate with them.

President Tudjman suffered much during his long illness. He bore his trial with courage, without, however, any weakening in his determination to serve his country. Our compassion goes out today in particular to those who were by his side in his last struggle, the members of his family and those near to him who felt and saw the pain of a dear one without being able to keep him in their midst. We pay tribute to them and we salute his memory.

The President: I now call on the representative of the United States of America, who will speak on behalf of the host country.

Mr. Holbrooke (United States): I am honoured to represent the United States today and to speak for the first time from this historic podium to commemorate and mark the passing of President Franjo Tudjman of Croatia.

I knew him well and worked with him closely. He was a major historical figure, and he has written an important page in the history of Europe. That role will be long discussed and long debated, but his importance cannot be denied. He has left a lasting mark on the region.

I met him first in 1995 and met him at least a hundred times after that, including many intense meetings during the 21 days of the Dayton negotiations that brought an end to the war in Bosnia. History must record that without his decisive involvement in Dayton, the

peace that was forged there would probably not have been possible.

But as I said a moment ago, the history of this region is still being written and argued about. Indeed, the arguments over history are part of what has contributed to the terrible drama of Southeast Europe and the wars in the former Yugoslavia. And so when we mark President Tudjman's passing, we also mark the fact that the issues that brought him to the fore have not yet been resolved. We pray for the people of Croatia, of Bosnia and Herzegovina, of Macedonia, of Kosovo, of Montenegro, of Serbia that they will be able to find the peace they deserve in the next century.

President Tudjman's dream of an independent Croatia has been realized, and he will be for ever remembered for that achievement,but the rest of the dream — peace and coexistence with all the neighbours of the region — is far from achieved. Ethnic division — stupid ethnic division, unnecessary division based on alleged ethnic differences, and I stress the word alleged — still plagues the region. To those people in the region who are watching this important memorial at the General Assembly today, I say to you: It is time to put these divisions behind you. None of the countries of the region can live in peace unless they all do.

Franjo Tudjman had a dream for Croatia that has been substantially, but not entirely, realized. The next generation of leaders in Croatia will, I hope, live up to that vision and carry it forward for freedom and democracy, for a successful election in Croatia — which is forthcoming soon — for full implementation of the Dayton peace process, for a solution to the unresolved questions of Kosovo and for a multi-ethnic Bosnian and Herzegovinian neighbour to Croatia, one in which Bosnian Croats, Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Muslims can live together.

That is what I hope the legacy of Franjo Tudjman will include. I will remember him personally as an effective and tenacious defender of his national interests to whom his people owe an immense amount, as a person with whom I worked closely, as a friend, as a major historical figure in the post-cold-war history of Europe, and as a man whose ultimate legacy, I hope, will be that he contributed to peace and stability in the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Croatia.

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia): I am thankful, M President, for your kind words of sympathy and for the of the colleagues who have expressed their condolenc

Seven and a half years ago, Mr. Franjo Tudjm addressed the General Assembly from this very pla after the accession of Croatia to the United Natio Croatia's citizens were deeply moved then just as th are today, having parted with their first democratical elected President.

Franjo Tudjman lived Croatia's turbulent twentie century as passionately as could be said for any of citizens. He was not merely a witness to the passi events that occurred in Croatia over the 77 years of h life. Rather, he was an active participant and, in the pa decade, a leader who was instrumental in achieving independent Croatia. He was perhaps the last of t contemporary European leaders to have direct participated in the anti-fascist struggle during the Seco World War. However, he will undoubtedly remembered for the last 10 years of his life, when came onto the international stage as a statesman. In t overall context of his life, this final period was mere the result of many decades of political idealism a activism and fighting for justice, equality and, ultimatel self-determination.

In 1969, he became one of the leaders of the gre liberalization movement known as the Croatian Sprin After the brutal crushing of that movement he w sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Upon his relea he was stripped of his civil rights, including the right speak in public, to travel outside the country and publish. In 1977, he violated that ban by granting interview to a European television station. Following th he was put on trial again.

At that time, I was a student. I remember hov together with others, we defiantly copied and illegal distributed the brave and brilliant statement that he ha made at the end of the show trial against him. He w then sentenced to three years imprisonment and the lo of all civil rights for eight years. It was during th sentence that he was named a prisoner of conscience b Amnesty International.

At elections held in April and May 1990, th political party that he led won power and he w appointed President. In the months that followed, Croat continued to seek an accommodation with the oth republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslav

on the basis of equality, as guaranteed by the federal Constitution. However, the continued disintegration of the former federal State, the belligerence of Serbian authorities and severe military aggression against an unarmed population led Croatia to declare independence on 25 June 1991.

Following the adoption of Croatia's first democratic Constitution, Tudjman was elected, and subsequently re-elected, to the post of President. At the time of his passing, he was serving his final constitutionally designated term of office.

I thank all of you for the sympathy, understanding and support you have expressed, which at this moment are once again so much needed in my country.

Agenda item 45

Global implications of the year 2000 date conversion problem of computers

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/525)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.61)

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Lesotho to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.61.

Mr. Mangoaela (Lesotho): I have the honour to introduce the draft resolution on the global implications of the year 2000 date conversion problem of computers, contained in document A/54/L.61. Although this draft resolution is submitted under the name of Lesotho alone, it has been the subject of wide consultations. After the text had been agreed, some delegations indicated that they still wished to co-sponsor it. I should therefore advise those delegations that wish to do so that there is still time to become a sponsor by signing up with the conference officer.

For a little more than a year now the Economic and Social Council's Working Group on Informatics has worked assiduously to focus the attention of the international community on the dangers posed to the global economy by the date change problem of computers. In this regard, the Working Group organized a global conference of national Y2K coordinators, and more than 120 Member States met at the United Nations in New York on 11 December 1998. At that conference the participants exchanged views about addressing the Y2K problem in their respective Member States and regions, as well as at the international level, and agreed that a major international effort had to be undertaken over the next 12 months to minimize the effects of Y2K. They endorsed the guidelines for addressing the year 2000 problem adopted by the Economic and Social Council and called for their wide dissemination.

The participants also agreed the matter had to be accorded the highest priority by their national Governments in order to ensure the Y2K compliance of critical systems. At the same time, they underlined the responsibility of all levels of government and the private sector to take the necessary steps to ensure that their systems are ready for the year 2000. Finally, they highlighted the fact that, given the interconnections in international networking in the modern world, cooperative international efforts and agreements were essential to address the Y2K problem globally. Accordingly, Governments were encouraged to accord attention to the problem at all appropriate international meetings throughout 1999.

Convinced that the range and complexity of the Y2K problem required immediate and concrete remedial action commensurate with the magnitude of the problem, the assembled Y2K national coordinators advised that consideration should be given to establishing a coordinating mechanism with support staff funded by voluntary contributions. This coordinating mechanism could also encourage the public sharing and disclosure of important information relating to the year 2000. Pursuant to that concern, the International Y2K Cooperation Centre was created in February this year under the auspices of the United Nations, with funding from the World Bank. Its mission is to promote increased strategic cooperation and actions among Governments, civil society and the private sector to minimize adverse Y2K effects on the global economy and society.

The International Y2K Cooperation Centre, under the leadership of the international Y2K Steering Committee, which I have the honour to chair in my capacity as Chairman of the United Nations Working Group on Informatics, set about to coordinate the efforts of Member States in six regions of the world. The evaluation made by the Steering Committee shows that the world is mostly ready for Y2K, across all infrastructure sectors and across all regions. In addition, the international community is prepared to tell the world what is happening during and after the date change, and to respond to Y2K emergencies, should any arise. In a

few days, the world's Y2K preparations will be put to the test.

Full readiness for Y2K means having fixed and tested systems and having prepared and tested contingency plans. While not every country or infrastructure strictly meets this standard, most countries' critical infrastructures will function adequately over the date change and in the early part of January.

This general statement masks a variety of specific situations. Industrialized countries are highly dependent on digital systems. In general, these countries have spent a great deal of effort preparing those systems for the date change and have made elaborate contingency plans. Developing country infrastructures are less dependent on digital systems. In general, those countries are less far along in fixing systems. However, they are made less vulnerable to system failures by their everyday use of manual and analog procedures and real-life contingency operations.

Y2K's effects will last beyond early January. Errors in systems that have not been fixed, and unexpected errors in fixed systems, will lead to degraded performance in infrastructures in the weeks following the date change. The extent and duration of this kind of infrastructure degradation will depend on a complex set of factors, including the degree to which Y2K system repairs have been completed and tested, the complexity of the affected systems, the availability of skilled personnel to find and solve the causes of the errors, to what extent other systems depend on data from the error-producing systems, and the infrastructure operator's ability to work around the errors for an extended period. The world will be well into January before a considered assessment can be made of Y2K's medium-term effects.

The International Y2K Cooperation Centre is monitoring progress in nine critical infrastructure sectors: energy, telecommunications, finance, transportation, health and hospitals, government services, customs and immigration, food, and water. With two exceptions, the assessment has revealed that, around the world, these infrastructures will function as well as they normally do in the first days of the new year. However, some infrastructures can be expected to experience degradation in the ensuing weeks.

There are two notable exceptions to this benign short-term prediction, namely health and hospitals, and government services. Particularly in developing countries, and in smaller organizations worldwide, thes infrastructures present a real risk that Y2K-cause disruptions could adversely affect public health and safet in the early days of January.

Over the past year, an incredible amount o collaborative work has been done in the Internationa Y2K Cooperation Centre's eight regions, representin 196 countries. Notwithstanding all the Y2K preparations however, some things will go wrong. In some cases, th problems may be serious enough to exceed the capacit of a country to respond to them. To assist in those kind of cases, should any arise, a set of international network is being established.

The responsibility to respond to Y2K-cause problems rests primarily with the local and nationa infrastructure operators and authorities. Where thos organizations encounter Y2K technical problems that the are unable to address, regional sector networks are bein established to share common problems and solutio approaches. Each of these networks is organize somewhat differently, depending on the sector and th region involved. For example, in the Asia region, Japa has organized energy providers throughout the region int a phone and e-mail contact network. In southern an eastern Africa, a variety of networks are bein established. In South America, six critical sectors have well-established phone network and contact procedure for all 10 countries in the region. The sectors of finance telecommunications and aviation are being organized o a global basis through public- and private-secto organizations.

Should local and regional resources prov insufficient to address Y2K technical problems, th World Bank and the United Nations Developmen Programme (UNDP), in cooperation with the G-8 countries and other donor nations, is establishing th capacity to mobilize sector experts to assist national Y2K coordinators in assessing the problem.

These diagnostic teams will be funded wit donations from Japan, the United Kingdom, the Unite States and other countries. The United Kingdom ha taken leadership in the health sector, working on a globa basis to establish both regional and global capacity t respond to requests for Y2K technical assistance. I general, in the period following the date change, th International Y2K Cooperation Centre will receive an catalogue requests for technical assistance from national Governments and will refer the request to its own

volunteer teams, to the World Bank or UNDP, or directly to donor countries for response. Should long-term or high-cost technical assistance be needed, the World Bank will assist countries in obtaining the necessary funding, in cooperation with national Governments and international organizations.

Y2K is a unique event in human history. While those who are working on the problem on a daily basis believe that Y2K's adverse effects will be moderate, the world has never experienced an event so ubiquitous and simultaneous. In addition, it is possible that some will try to take advantage of Y2K to create non-Y2K disruptions in digital systems or in society. For these reasons, in an abundance of caution, nations and international institutions are preparing as they would for a serious emergency. The Working Group on Informatics is both hopeful and confident that Y2K will instead prove to be an example of the best traits of human cooperation and hard work in resolving an important problem.

I should like to conclude by pointing out that in the seventh preambular paragraph of the draft resolution before us, the word "continued" was inadvertently omitted. That paragraph should read,

> "*Emphasizing also* that continued coordinated efforts by Governments and private, public and international organizations are required to address the year 2000 problem".

Mr. Khare (India): Allow me at the outset to thank the Secretary-General for the comprehensive report on the steps taken within the United Nations system to resolve the year 2000 date conversion problem of computers. We would also like to express our appreciation to Mr. Ahmad Kamal, the former Permanent Representative of Pakistan, and to Mr. Percy Mangoaela, the Permanent Representative of Lesotho, who as Chairmen of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics have played a constructive role in facilitating interaction among Member States. India would of course be privileged to be a sponsor of the draft resolution drawn up under the guidance of the representative of Lesotho.

As my delegation outlined last year, the Government of India is committed to averting and controlling the Y2K crisis in critical Government sectors and public and private organizations and services. Serious efforts have been made to sensitize all such entities for strict compliance in a time-bound manner. A high-level action force on managing the impact of the Y2K problem in India was established, with representatives from the Government, industry associations, banks and financial institutions, the defence services, utilities and other public service organizations, the railways and other sectors.

The action force held three meetings and advised each central Government department to set up Y2K action groups for assessing the status of preparedness regarding Y2K problems in that department and any public undertakings or attached offices under its administrative control, and proposed future actions. In the context of the overall Y2K preparedness of the country, the Y2K action force has been closely monitoring the preparedness of critical sectors, such as those of finance — including banking and insurance — power generation, the petroleum industry, telecommunications, civil aviation, railways and other surface transport, including ports, and space research, atomic energy and defence.

The Department of Atomic Energy is Y2K-ready. All the organizations functioning under it have also prepared detailed contingency plans, and an emergency control room has been established, which operates around the clock. It will be placed on a higher alert during the transition period to the year 2000.

The Reserve Bank of India has also taken major initiatives to ensure the year 2000 preparedness of banks and financial institutions. All commercial banks have reported the full Y2K compliance of their internal systems. Furthermore, all the non-banking subsidiaries of commercial banks have reported Y2K compliance. Contingency plans drawn up include the maintenance of hard copies of bank accounts, with print-outs to account holders being provided from tomorrow, 15 December; the maintenance of adequate cash supplies; and the establishment of event-management centres.

The civil aviation sector is Y2K-ready, including with regard to navigation and landing systems, monopulse secondary radars at all eight international airports and a new cargo management system at Indira Gandhi International Airport. All meteorological services for aviation have been assessed, tested and made Y2K-compliant by the Indian meteorological department. Aviation fuel service providers have been assessed and confirmed free from any Y2K problems. All airlines — Air India, Indian Airlines and other private airlines — have completed procedures for the assessment, testing and necessary modification of their hardware and software systems. The aircraft and airborne certificates

from vendors and manufacturers such as Boeing and Airbus Industries have been obtained, confirming Y2K readiness.

Passenger facilities such as reservations, check-in and boarding equipment, aerobridges and escalators have been attended to and made Y2K-compliant. The Airports Authority of India has also drawn up contingency plans for international as well as domestic flights in Indian air space to deal with any Y2K-related problems which may arise. Contingency plans for domestic and international air traffic routes and air traffic procedures, including increased longitudinal separation between flights, have been finalized in coordination with the International Civil Aviation Organization's Asia and Pacific regional office. The Airports Authority of India will also set up national Y2K air traffic management centres from 1330 hours Indian Standard Time on 31 December 1999.

Of the 23 stock exchanges operating in the securities market, 16 Y2K-compliant exchanges have more than 95 per cent of daily turnover. The remaining seven, which are non-compliant, contribute only 5 per cent to the turnover and are being constantly monitored. The Reserve Bank of India has already worked out a detailed contingency plan and has directed these institutions to develop their own contingency plans to assure the continuity of business as an integral part of the institution's year 2000 preparedness.

The telecommunications sector, too, is Y2K-compliant. Control rooms at national, state and telecommunications district level will be set up for high-risk dates. Special operations staff will be positioned to manage any Y2K eventualities. In the railways sector, the highest-priority area is the passenger reservation system. Most of the work related to this system has been completed, and a contingency plan has been worked out. Major ports in India have already taken necessary action and a lot of progress has been achieved. To date, the ports sector does not anticipate any threat on this account. The power sector has been considered the top-priority sector to avoid any cascading effect. The total installed generating capacity in the country is 93,239 megawatts, with an effective capacity of 92,904 megawatts. Only 31,708 megawatts will be influenced by Y2K. The controls of the remaining 61,196 megawatts are of analog character and therefore their operation is not influenced by Y2K.

Relevant utilities in central and state sectors are Y2K-ready, and provisions have been made for control rooms that will function from midnight on 30 December 1999 to 3 January 2000. The petroleum sector, too, is largely in control of its own Y2K programme. It is fully Y2K-compliant, with the sole exception of one digital control system at the gas sweetening plant at Hazira.

Regarding space research, Y2K compliance has been attained for the on-board segment of satellites and launch vehicles, ground stations, the launch complex, central computer facilities, systems supplied to user agencies, laboratory instruments and office automation applications. Indian Space Research Organization global positioning system (GPS) receivers performed normally during GPS roll-over. Contingency plans have been put in place for the transition period should any unforeseen disruptions occur.

In the spirit of transparency and democracy, and since the Y2K problem is as much a management and information problem as a technical one, regular reports on India's Y2K status are freely put out on the Internet. We trust that we are well prepared to meet the Y2K challenge, even though the nature of the problem is such that no one, including us, can be fully sure that no disruptions will occur.

Besides the mission-critical sectors I have mentioned, which have been reviewed intensively, the health sector is also fully prepared to face the Y2K problem. Major referral hospitals have taken care of Y2K problems, and in minor hospitals Y2K is not a serious issue. Water supply and sewerage will not pose any problem. Other economic sectors, such as revenue including excise, custom, and direct taxes, chemicals and fertilizers, steel and mines, and the like, are also Y2K-ready.

Mr. Farar (United States of America): The United States is pleased to be part of a major international effort to respond to possible Y2K problems. We recognize the importance of global cooperation on this issue. With the rollover a scant 16 days away, there is still work that we all must focus on for now and for after 1 January. The United Nations has an exceptional track record on this issue, dating back to last year, when Ambassador Kamal, former Chairman of the Working Group on Informatics, took a leadership role in bringing together all Member States for the first worldwide meeting of national Y2K coordinators. The progress made since that 11 December 1998 meeting has been carried out in large part through the efforts of the regional coordinators. Bulgaria, Chile, the Gambia, Japan, Mexico, Morocco and the Philippines are to be congratulated for their role in guiding regional action to address the Y2K problem.

Other mechanisms under the rubric of international organizations have contributed in a major way to dealing with this challenge that faces us all. The International Maritime Organization, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Telecommunication Union and others have proved useful in addressing specific sector-related Y2K problems. The United Nations humanitarian organizations too have made great progress over the past year in preparing for possible Y2K emergencies. Additionally, regional organizations such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, the Group of Eight economies, the European Union and the Organization of American States have played key roles in supporting these international efforts. Wherever possible, the United States has sought to join with its regional counterparts to participate in Y2K remediation and response planning activities. By working together, the world has shared the burden of addressing this vexing challenge.

As we stand on the threshold of the date change, the importance of regional cooperation cannot be overstated. Our neighbours will be the first to feel the effects of any Y2K difficulties we may experience and will be the first to notice any problems we may suffer. In responding to these situations, it is neighbours that will be able to respond fastest, by virtue of proximity. Despite the cooperation and the significant information-sharing that have been accomplished to date, there is still important work left to do, including preparing to handle whatever situations may arise after the rollover.

January first has not yet arrived; now is the time for all to focus on last-minute contingency planning to minimize the effects of possible disruptions. It is also the time to continue to forward information to the proper international-sector organizations so that the most current data will be available.

The United States looks forward to continued cooperation with other members of the Assembly to assist other nations, and ourselves, in final preparations. All nations should continue to work within the international and regional mechanisms available to them as we all strive to be as prepared as possible for whatever may occur.

While national endeavours are of prime importance, cross-border assistance efforts help us to recognize the globalized nature of this problem. In addition, it is important for all of us to encourage the private sector to continue its role in the international arena for maintaining the emphasis on capabilities for contingency planning and for pre-positioning responses. The private sector has played an important role in remediation and information-sharing, a role which is so vital to our efforts. The private sector will have a very important role in any recovery efforts that may be necessary in the early part of next year.

As we move closer to the rollover, we need to continue our forward-thinking approach and consider how best to respond to requests for technical assistance should there be severe difficulties. The International Year 2000 Cooperation Centre, created with funding from the World Bank at the request of the participants in the first United Nations meeting last December, has agreed to serve as a coordinating mechanism to ensure that the response to requests for technical assistance is timely and well choreographed. This will minimize duplication of efforts and ensure quick assistance. The United States encourages all Member States to take advantage of the coordinating mechanism that the Centre affords us and to provide regular status reports to it in the format agreed to by most Y2K coordinators.

Efficient, timely and well-organized responses to requests for technical assistance will not only help to showcase the good work we have done up to this point, but, more important, will also limit the disruptions that might be felt worldwide.

The same is true for humanitarian assistance. We must be able to respond to any needs that may arise as a result of Y2K. Through already-established mechanisms, the United Nations and all members of the international community must be committed to providing appropriate assistance if and when it is required. In addition, we must be sure that humanitarian agencies are aware of credible reports of Y2K-related emergencies. As with any humanitarian emergency, and in keeping with General Assembly resolution 51/194 of 10 February 1997, the United States urges all Governments, non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental organizations to share reports on Y2K emergencies with Reliefweb, the premier disaster-reporting Web site of the United Nations. In similar fashion, all humanitarian agencies should monitor the site as well; it can be found at http://www.notes.reliefweb.int.

We as a world body have done a lot of work regarding this enormous issue. It might prove useful for us to think about what this means for the future: that is, after Y2K. The close cooperation and the coordination efforts that have occurred during the past two years might

well translate into successful endeavours for dealing with the information technology challenges of the future, particularly in developing countries and for combatting threats to information security, as well as for promoting electronic commerce. We have seen the benefits of working well together, and it would be a testament to the good work we have done on Y2K if we were to take this momentum and drive this endeavour, focusing it on the new information technology issues that are now emerging worldwide.

I want to state strongly the commitment of the United States to dealing with Y2K as part of the international community. We would like to praise Ambassador Percy Metsing Mangoacia for following Ambassador Kamal in his efforts to focus activity on the first challenge of the next century. We strongly encourage all countries to continue their open policies of information, sharing their efforts to remediate any problems and their thoughtfulness in preparing for contingencies. We are fully committed to the draft resolution now before the Assembly, and we look forward to continued cooperation on Y2K with all members of this body.

Mr. Forner-Rouira (Andorra): In the field of computer technology Andorra has made its contribution to the United Nations since our membership in 1993. The Permanent Mission of the Principality of Andorra proposed to the Group of Western European and other States in 1994 to study the possibility of the computerization of the Group's archives. As a result of his mandate, renewed in 1996, the President of the Government of Andorra, Mr. Marc Forné Molné came to the United Nations in May 1998 to present a programme, carried out by our National Centre for Informatics, in which the Group's archives were finally computerized.

President Forné has offered on several occasions the assistance of our country to the other regional groups and the different institutions of the United Nations that might want to share our experience in that field. Every effort has been made to make this system compliant. In Andorra, the same National Centre of Informatics has already verified that the 40,000 different programmes used by the Government are also Y2K compliant. For almost three years, the Government has striven to arrive to the year 2000 with almost 100 per cent of the systems fixed.

Last year the General Assembly adopted resolution 53/86, in which it requested the Secretary-General to take the necessary steps to ensure that all computers within the United Nations system be Y2K compliant. We have read the report of the Secretary-General very carefully, a we congratulate the Secretariat for all the steps a initiatives taken to that end. We encourage it to make additional effort to solve the 21 per cent of applicatio that still need correction. We would like to underline t excellent work realized during two years by the Ad H Open-ended Working Group on Informatics, led by Chairman, Ambassador Kamal, especially in conveni a meeting where representatives of more than 1 countries could share their worries and natio experiences with regard to the year 2000 compliance.

The first day of January 2000 is around the corn In order to evaluate the possible implications of the Y problem, one should consider the region of the world t it is going to affect. On the one hand, in develop countries — which have fewer computers per squ mile, mainly because of the lack of econon resources — almost 50 per cent of the population h never seen or used a computer in their entire life. Th countries seem safer from Y2K consequences for t simple reason that their way of living does not depe vitally on technology, but precisely the lack of continues to make their lives less comfortable. On t other hand, in developed countries, with more comput per square mile, a five-year old child already spends a of his or her time in front of a screen playing vid games. It seems less likely that these countries will affected by the Y2K problem, since their Governme have already been spending large amounts to be prepa for the eventuality. However, in these countries, wh every little aspect of our lives is linked to a machine, t most insignificant problem could make us spend hours the airport, or in the worst case in the hospital, and could also affect our credit cards, thus reducing capability to acquire primary goods.

This paradox deserves a deeper consideration. T century, humanity has spent a lot of energy and funds the search of new technologies that could improve well-being. However, and precisely because of t thrust, the gap between the poorest and the richest widening, and we are becoming less sensitive to sufferings that afflict other people around the plan Perhaps we have overlooked or misunderstood the iss and we should have been sharing our improvements technology with those that do not have any before taki another step.

As President Forné already stated, the world of new millennium will be: "a world which will creat new group of marginalized people: those who

geographically challenged, who have less economic resources or who do not have the cultural capacity to access information and to transform it into useful skills". To prevent that we not only have to promote education but also to share among ourselves what we have learnt so far. The transfer of information is a critical issue for the equilibrium of inequalities.

Y2K is not the end of the world; it is just the end of a millennium. We must shake hands with every single person around the globe and use the coming 1 January as the starting point to cooperate with each other.

Mr. Stuart (Australia): My delegation is pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the item concerning global implications of the year 2000 date conversion problem of computers, and we welcome the report of the Secretary-General. We wish to thank Ambassador Mangoaela and Ambassador Kamal for their efforts in focusing attention in the United Nations system on the year 2000 problem.

Australia commends the United Nations proactive facilitation of international cooperation towards addressing Y2K. In particular, recognition should be given to the contribution of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics, the International Y2K Cooperation Center headed by Mr. Bruce McConnell and the work of United Nations specialized agencies, such as the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Australia has strongly supported resolution 53/86 on international cooperation on the Y2K problem. We participated in both meetings of the National Y2K Coordinators convened by the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics and the Second Global Y2K Summit in Manila in March 1999. We have been working closely with regional partners, including at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Y2K symposium in Singapore in April 1999 and the Asian Regional Y2K Coordinators meeting in Tokyo in September of this year. Throughout this year, Australian ministers have regularly discussed Y2K with a wide range of overseas counterparts. In addition, the Australian Government and industry have been working closely with regional partners on Y2K cross-border infrastructure areas, particularly aviation, shipping, power and telecommunications. Australia has been pleased to provide assistance to Pacific Forum island countries, focusing on identifying and helping to address strategic sectoral Y2K problems.

Within Australia, the cooperative effort between government and industry has enabled us to implement comprehensive Y2K preparations. These have been included in examples of the world's best practice.

Japan, as a regional coordinator, has been discussing with the International Y2K Cooperation Centre and with partners in the Asia-Pacific region the scope for assisting, through the United Nations Development Programme, developing countries in our region to address possible Y2K failures after the date change. Australia would be pleased to examine its capacity to provide technical assistance for that purpose. The type of assistance required would clearly depend very much on the scope and nature of any problems identified. Australia contributed to a recent APEC initiative to identify government and private sector contacts in areas of key cross-border sectoral importance. These contacts could be used to identify the scope to provide technical expertise.

Australia will be one of the first countries to enter the year 2000. As a result, we are conscious that there has been a degree of international interest in our experience. Information on Australia's progress through the year 2000 date change will be collected, coordinated and disseminated from a Year 2000 National Coordination Centre which will operate from 31 December 1999 to 7 January 2000. The Year 2000 National Coordination Centre, in Canberra, will be part of a network of Government coordination centres being established in each capital city.

A key role of the Coordination Centre in the first 24 hours of its operation will be to prepare national summary bulletins based on information obtained from state and territory governments and from the private sector. On 1 January these national bulletins will report Y2K status at 4 a.m., 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. The reports issued by the centre will be posted on the web site www.y2kaustralia.gov.au, and will be provided to the global status watch Web page of the International Y2K Cooperation Center.

Australia has been pleased to actively support the United Nations efforts to encourage international attention to the cross-border impacts of Y2K, to facilitate direct sector-to-sector contacts and to urge all Governments to widely share with the public detailed information on their country's Y2K readiness. We have supported the United Nations efforts to work with regional partners to intensify cooperative efforts on contingency planning and to cooperate on appropriate mechanisms for early advice to

the public on Y2K problems as they occur during the Y2K roll-over period.

The role of the United Nations in facilitating international cooperation on these issues clearly extends into the year 2000. There has been significant progress, particularly in the last six months, in international preparedness, including contingency planning. Just what the impact of the international problems will be remains very difficult to assess. Their duration and gravity will depend on the level of remediation and the integrity of testing, on the nature and effectiveness of contingency plans that have been developed, and on the capability of key service sectors in individual countries to resume operations quickly. In many countries the impact of Y2K problems may be limited or negligible, but in some others it may be more severe.

Although some Y2K problems are expected to be manifest early in the year 2000, many international experts expect that the incidence and impact of these problems may well extend into the first half of next year. Hence it will be important for Member States to continue to work together to provide to the public early advice on Y2K problems as they occur during the roll-over period. It will also be important for Member States to continue their close cooperation in meeting any ongoing challenges in the year 2000.

Mr. Hughes (New Zealand): At 5.45 on the morning of 1 January 2000, the sun will begin to rise over the east coast of New Zealand. New Zealand's easternmost city, Gisborne, will be literally the first city to see the light of the new millennium. New Zealand is 13 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time and 18 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time, which prevails in New York. The transition to the new millennium is the object of much positive anticipation around the world. It is ironic, however, that the new age also brings with it a threat of our own making: the "millennium bug".

The worldwide battle against that bug graphically demonstrates that dependence on technology is not just a developed-world phenomenon. All countries have grappled with the year 2000 problem, and all have realized just how much a part of life the tiny computer chip now is.

The United Nations has taken a lead, both in raising awareness of the problem and in helping nations address it. The Secretary-General's report in document A/54/525 summarizes steps taken by the Organization itself, and in conjunction with Member States. My delegation wishes to commend the Working Group on Informatics, particularly Ambassadors Mangoaela and Kamal for their work in drafting best-practice guidelines for assessing and solving year 2000 problems and for establishing contingency plans at the national and international level.

New Zealand's own planning has had a similar focus. A national committee, the Y2K Readiness Commission, has the primary role in coordinating awareness-raising activities. A recent survey indicated that 99 per cent of the public are aware of Y2K, and two thirds of them have already made plans to deal with the sort of localized, short-term problems that may occur.

Business, too, is well prepared, with 87 per cent confident they have done everything necessary to maintain essential services for customers. Equally importantly, the providers of services such as electricity and telecommunications are confident of their preparations and are expecting minor disruptions at most.

The Readiness Commission has also played a key role in ensuring sharing of information and experience between sectors and with the Government. Independent audits of Government departments have been conducted throughout 1999, and ministers have made public a "scorecard" of results to demonstrate the high degree of readiness of central and local agencies.

New Zealand has also taken a regional approach to the year 2000 issue. We have worked with our Asia/Pacific neighbours on joint approaches to alleviate the risks faced. It was in Auckland that Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders expressed their commitment to contingency planning as a matter of the highest priority, especially in relation to cross-border issues and critical sectors such as financial services, telecommunications and power distribution. New Zealand fully endorsed that approach.

A number of donors have already been active in offering advice and assistance to the small and vulnerable South Pacific island States in respect to Y2K issues. Should our help be sought to deal with urgent problems arising in the new year, we stand ready to assist within the resources and capacity available under our official development assistance programme.

New Zealand will be a focus of world attention in the early hours of the year 2000, not just because the international media will be letting millions share the first sunrise with us, but also because we can provide insight

into the possible effects of the "millennium bug" on a computer-reliant infrastructure, and possibly give others a few vital hours of notice of what they might expect.

We have put in place detailed procedures to monitor the impact of Y2K on New Zealand at the millennium. The Ministry for Emergency Management is undertaking a national incident-monitoring function. It will gather information through a national incident monitoring system and forward this to our national Y2K Status Centre in Wellington. That Centre has responsibility to ensure that during and beyond the transition to the new century the Y2K status of New Zealand is regularly assessed and that the status is communicated to the Government, key sectors of the economy, the news media and the New Zealand public.

From 10 p.m. on 31 December through 6 p.m. on 2 January, the Y2K Readiness Commission and the Ministry for Emergency Management will operate joint Internet web sites containing regularly updated status reports which will include an overall comment on New Zealand's performance to date; the Y2K status of key sectors of the economy; whether any interruptions to essential services are insignificant, significant or severe; and estimated recovery time. The web site addresses are set out in the copy of this statement now being distributed. We have circulated to all missions details of these procedures in our note of 9 November 1999.

Similar status information will also be communicated to the International Y2K Cooperation Center in Washington, D.C., to which the United States delegate referred earlier this morning. The information provided to the Center can also be accessed by other Governments and the world media. The United Nations and the United States, which is hosting this Center, are to be congratulated for their positive response when the first United Nations meeting of national Y2K coordinators identified the need for such a global coordination point. The Center will play a critical role in providing Member States with an overview of the world's response to the "millennium bug".

The draft resolution before us today stresses the need for global cooperation to ensure a timely and effective response to the year 2000 challenge. This was not a challenge foreseen by the founders of this Organization, but it is a truly global challenge which the United Nations system is well placed to address through the range of measures set out in the Secretary-General's report: sharing information, knowledge and skills; engaging the private sector and civil society; applying regional mechanisms; and being prepared to respond to any humanitarian emergencies that could result from serious year 2000 failures.

New Zealand looks forward to joining the consensus on this draft resolution and to working with other Member States to meet the year 2000 challenge.

Mr. Tchoulkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian delegation is of the opinion that the Secretary-General's report on steps taken within the United Nations system and with Member States to resolve the year 2000 date conversion of computers deserves high appreciation. It is with great interest that we have studied the very detailed information on the degree of readiness of the various parts of the United Nations system, its network of field offices throughout the world and the international organizations.

It is difficult to overestimate the role played by the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics of the Economic and Social Council in raising countries' level of awareness of the year 2000 problem.

The unprecedented meetings of national coordinators on the year 2000 problem held over the past two years have enabled experts from more than 150 countries to have a direct dialogue, to exchange experience and to discuss joint actions in preparing for the computer millennium transition.

We highly appreciate the activities of the technical subgroup of the Working Group, headed by the former Permanent Representative of Pakistan, Mr. Kamal, and the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Lesotho, Mr. Mangoaela, which ensured the implementation of a number of measures to improve the access of Members States to United Nations documentation and the databases of its divisions. One important achievement of the subgroup was the opportunity provided to the majority of permanent missions in New York to enjoy free access to the Internet.

The solution of the problem of possible computer failure at the transition to the new millennium is deemed a priority State task in the Russian Federation. To prepare computer networks in Russia for the change of millennium, the appropriate decrees of the President and Government have been issued. Work is proceeding in accordance with the national plan of action to address the year 2000 problem in the Russian Federation, developed

by a government commission for the year 2000 problem. To implement these tasks, a vertical structure has been set up. Federal, local and municipal authorities have formed commissions and working groups to address this problem. They are also working at the sectoral and inter-sectoral levels at enterprises and sites. A network of such bodies was established first in the most vulnerable industrial areas, such as oil and energy, transport, finance, social services, telecommunications and defence.

The comprehensive methodological basis for addressing the year 2000 problem was developed and brought to the attention of managers and technical staff. In order to raise public awareness and prepare the population for the transition of computer systems to the new millennium, a series of television and radio programmes has been broadcast and a number of press publications have been prepared. In our country, all possible efforts are being made to avoid or to minimize the probability of any negative consequences of the transition.

We are aware of the concern of the international community regarding the year 2000 problem in the sphere of nuclear energy, in which, for well-known reasons, Russia is as interested as all others. Intensive work is being undertaken in our country in this area. The Kola nuclear power station may serve as an example: its readiness for the year 2000 has been assessed and acknowledged by the specialized commissions, with the participation of United States experts in September 1999 and of representatives of the World Association of Nuclear Operators in November 1999, who offered positive appraisals.

The preparation process for the new millennium in the fuel and energy complex as a whole is being implemented successfully in Russia and we are ready to continue to meet our international obligations on gas and oil deliveries. In this field, we are taking such measures as the fine-tuning of storage circuits, emergency testing and the coordination of the functioning of the pipeline systems with the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Baltic States and Eastern Europe.

We are also aware of the concern of the international community over the military aspect of the year 2000 problem. We have undertaken a number of steps in this direction with our partners at the multilateral and bilateral levels. In particular, we have agreed with the United States to the establishment of a channel of direct communication between the centres for the maintenance of strategic stability in connection with the year 2000 problem. The ministers of defence of our two countries signed in September a joint statement on the establishment of the Center for Y2K Strategic Stability in Colorado Springs. Consultations with the United Kingdom on military aspects of the solution to the problem of the transition of computer systems to the new millennium were held in Russia in October.

Russia also participated in the discussion of the year 2000 problem at G-8 summits in Birmingham in 1998 and Cologne in 1999 and in a number of meetings of G-8 experts on this issue in Germany and Italy this year, at which the parties exchanged information and opinions on the state of progress in addressing this problem and overcoming the negative consequences of possible computer failure. Thus, we can declare with confidence that Russia is generally ready for the transition of information systems to the new millennium and to overcome its possible negative consequences.

In conclusion, the Russian delegation is ready to support the draft resolution contained in document A/54/L.61.

Mr. Jacob (Israel): It was long hoped that the technological and telecommunications revolution would bridge the gaps that divide us. We had hoped the year 2,000 would open the door to an interconnected world, eroding the old lines between geographic haves and have-nots.

But now, as we look on the information emanating from sources across the globe and from the global meetings of national year 2000 coordinators, an unfortunate message emerges from the year 2000 bug. It threatens technologically to widen the very fissures we had hoped to close. It further distances nations from one another. At this point, if reports are correct, we can assume that at least some of the greater dangers of the year 2000 bug — threatening loss of industry and even human life — will simply not be solved when the clock strikes midnight.

We wish to add our voice to the nations advocating a shift in emphasis at this juncture to focus now on recovery efforts over the first few months of the new year. We welcome the model in the Secretary-General's report on steps taken within the United Nations system and with Member States to resolve the year 2000 date conversion problem of computers, in which there is a

focus on mission-critical operations, where there is a risk of crisis.

The new millennium will not be worth celebrating if it heralds disasters in any nation anywhere on the globe. Just as we could not rely entirely on information technology to break down the world's barriers, we dare not rely on its innovations alone to prevent disaster. I repeat: parallel contingency measures must now take primary focus outside the sphere of information technology. Mobile generators, alternative power sources, public awareness campaigns, international coordination — all these are now as essential as any corrective measures.

An investigation by the Israel Y2K Coordination Committee has looked into which areas, in any national infrastructure, are most likely to be affected and in need of recovery, even with preparation efforts. The warning zones are: electric companies, water resources, transportation of all types and hospital equipment. Failure to place emphasis on these areas could lead to a catastrophe. For these reasons, organs with responsibility for these sectors of national infrastructure should have a central role in the planning process.

From this podium I invite Member States to join us in the coming months in multinational efforts to help one another recover from whatever crises may emerge and to repair any damage. Let us hope that we can celebrate the new year and start the new millennium with confidence, peace of mind and the dawn of a new era in which technology will bridge differences, and not create them.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. The Assembly shall now take a decision on draft resolution A/54/L.61, as orally revised.

I should like to announce that since the introduction of the draft resolution, the following countries have become sponsors: Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Gabon, Greece, India, Ireland, Italy, Mauritius, Norway, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/54/L.61, as orally revised?

The draft resolution, as orally revised, was adopted. (resolution 54/114).

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 45?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 174

International recognition of the Day of Vesak

Draft resolution (A/54/L.59)

The President: I call on the representative of Sri Lanka to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.59.

Mr. De Saram (Sri Lanka): On behalf of the delegation of Sri Lanka, I have the great honour today of introducing in the General Assembly the item "International recognition of the Day of Vesak".

When addressing the General Assembly in the plenary debate on 23 September this year, the Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka, the Honourable Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, conveyed to the Assembly, pursuant to a decision taken at an international Buddhist conference in Sri Lanka, a hope that was later endorsed by the Government of Sri Lanka that the United Nations would find it possible to give international recognition to the Day of Vesak, the most sacred day in the calendar of several hundred millions who, in a number of countries in a number of regions of the world, follow the teachings of the Buddha.

As the present millennium draws to a close, and the world awaits and prepares for the opening of the new millennium, the United Nations may wish to recall, it was hoped, the teachings reaching back two and a half millennia of the one known as the Buddha, the Enlightened One, who believed and taught that true and complete relief from the sufferings of the human condition lay in one's own true and complete understanding and control and purification of one's own thoughts and desires, and that this state of mind would lead one to the path of compassion for and service to others, and to a state of true and complete happiness. "One may conquer millions in battle, but he who conquers himself is alone the greatest of conquerors" was one of the Buddha's sayings, chronicles have recorded. The teachings of the Buddha brought then, and continue to bring now, understanding, happiness and solace to the lives of millions, originally in the countries of South Asia, South East Asia and East Asia, but now, also, to

additional millions in other countries in other regions of the world.

The General Assembly, in the universality of its membership and in the universality of its terms of reference, has in the past recognized many of the diverse concerns of our complex world. In so doing, the Assembly has acted in the knowledge that peoples in all regions of the world look fervently to the United Nations, and in particular to the General Assembly, for at least an acknowledgment of their concerns, hopes and beliefs.

It is in that spirit that the International Buddhist Conference in Sri Lanka looked to the United Nations for international recognition of the Day of Vesak, the Day of the Full Moon in the month of May on which over 150 million Buddhists around the world commemorate the birth, the attainment of enlightenment and the passing away of the Buddha, the Enlightened One.

The Buddha — born to royal comfort and privilege as Prince Siddartha Gautama in the sixth century before the beginning of the Christian era, at a place known as Lumbini, now in the modern State of Nepal — was so troubled by the sufferings of humanity that he renounced the comforts and privileges to which he had been born and devoted himself, sustained only by the basic necessities for life, thought and meditation, to years of wandering and reflection, in search of a complete and true understanding for himself of the sufferings of the human condition and a complete and true understanding of how relief from the suffering of the human condition may finally be completely and truly realized.

The Buddha's life and example so moved his contemporaries that his teachings were remembered and passed on through the centuries, moving the great warrior emperor Asoka of India, in the third century before the Christian era, to eschew wars and conquests and to give himself to the teachings of the Buddha. It was the great emperor Asoka who sent his son Mahinda and his daughter Sanghamitta to Sri Lanka with the teachings of the Buddha. Sanghamitta also brought to Sri Lanka a sapling of the Sacred Bo Tree, under which the Buddha had sat in teaching, in thought and meditation almost three centuries earlier.

The sacred sapling and the teachings of the Buddha flourished in Sri Lanka through the thousands of years that followed, and to this day. The sapling, now the Sacred Bo Tree of Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka, still stands and is loved and venerated or respected by all the people of Sri Lanka, be they Buddhists or followers of the other great religions of our land: Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. It is a sacred tree, engaging and uniting those of all faiths and religions in a spirit of religious understanding and tolerance that we pray will continue to flourish in Sri Lanka through the millennia.

The sponsors of the draft resolution before the General Assembly — and here I convey to all sponsors deepest gratitude for their support — would very much wish the Assembly, in adopting it, to recognize Vesak as the most sacred day in Buddhism, commemorated by hundreds of millions of Buddhists around the world, and to allow for appropriate arrangements to be made for observances of Vesak at United Nations Headquarters and at other United Nations offices. Arrangements for such observances would be made in consultation with the Secretariat and with such Permanent Missions and delegations as may also wish to participate, in order to ensure that such arrangements are appropriate and without cost to the United Nations.

On behalf of all the sponsors of the draft resolution, I am honoured to be in a position today to warmly commend this draft resolution on International recognition of the Day of Vesak. The following delegations are sponsors of draft resolution A/54/L.59: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Chile, Cyprus, Grenada, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Seychelles, Slovakia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Thailand and Ukraine. The delegations of Greece, Mauritius, Norway and Turkey have also asked to be included as sponsors.

The President: I now call on the representative of Thailand.

Mr. Wirasamban (Thailand): It is a privilege to speak under this agenda item entitled "International recognition of the Day of Vesak" as a representative of the world's largest Buddhist kingdom in our religiously diverse family of nations. For Buddhists worldwide, the Day of Vesak, or Visakha in the Thai language, is of special significance. It marks the day when three important events in the life of Lord Buddha converged: his birth, his attainment of enlightenment and his passing away. It is thus the single most important day in Buddhism.

Thailand, together with many other countries representing the full diversity of humankind's faiths, is proud to be a sponsor of this draft resolution on the international recognition of the Day of Vesak at the United Nations Headquarters and other United Nations offices. We are calling for the General Assembly to accord international recognition to Vesak and for the appropriate arrangements to be made for the international observance of this day at the United Nations. The observance will be without cost to the Organization.

The universal message of peace, goodwill and compassion preached by Lord Buddha more than 2,500 years ago has never been more relevant today. Mutual understanding, kindness to fellow human beings and compassion are the hallmarks of the Buddhist faith. Buddhism has always stressed the path of peaceful resolution of disputes between individuals or communities. Excessive competition is to be avoided. Violence in all forms and manifestations is shunned. By and large, therefore, Buddhism is synonymous with peace.

Because Buddhism firmly believes in freedom of choice for the individual and cherishes the diversity of human thought and ideas, it rejects the imposition of ideas on others. Tolerance is thus a central tenet in Buddhism. In Thailand, tolerance, particularly religious tolerance, is enshrined in our Constitution and, more importantly, ingrained in the Thai way of life. We are proud to have believers of all religions — Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Sikhs — coexisting peacefully in our country, with His Majesty the King of Thailand as the Upholder of all Faiths.

Lastly, Buddhism preaches moderation. The "Middle Path", as Buddhists call it, is a way of life which seeks to avoid the pitfalls of extremism. The sense of moderation serves as a foundation for the actions of Buddhists towards others and, we hope, guards against excesses which all too often manifest themselves in our global village.

The United Nations prides itself on being an organization that is universal and promotes respect for the diversity of ideas and beliefs throughout the world. The dialogue among civilizations is just one manifestation of this respect for diversity. It would reflect well on the universal character of the United Nations if it were to accord recognition to Buddhism, one of the world's oldest religions, and to millions of people in all parts of the world who practice it.

I therefore ask Member States to lend their support to this draft resolution on the international recognition of the Day of Vesak at United Nations Headquarters and other United Nations offices. This small but highly significant gesture would go a long way towards not only according recognition and respect to Buddhism and millions of Buddhists worldwide but also to reaffirming our strong commitment to the principle of respect for diversity which the United Nations and we Buddhists cherish.

Ms. Lee (Singapore): My delegation is of the view that the consideration of this agenda item is an appropriate mark of respect for the Buddha, a great spiritual teacher of compassion and humanity whose teachings provide guidance and inspiration to nearly a quarter of the world's population. In fact, his teachings also provide us with inspiration and lessons in our ongoing efforts in the United Nations to achieve peace and respect for each other's values.

Vesak Day, or the Flower Festival as it is sometimes known, is also celebrated in Singapore and is one of our four major festivals. About one third of Singapore's population are Buddhists. Vesak Day is a public holiday in Singapore, enabling Singaporeans of other religious denominations, such as Islam, Christianity and Hinduism, to name a few, to join in the celebrations of their Buddhist friends. This celebration of the rich variety of religions coexisting in Singapore is also a reflection of the diversity of races which live in harmony together.

My delegation therefore commends the initiative for several reasons. First, it is a fitting statement of the United Nations work on the eve of the third millennium. After all, the General Assembly has proclaimed the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace and declared the decade from 2001 to 2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World. One of the hallmarks of the Buddha's teachings is the promotion of peace and non-violence.

Secondly, the initiative provides us with an opportunity to pave the way for another General Assembly decision. The United Nations has also proclaimed the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. Through this international recognition of the Day of Vesak, other civilizations can gain knowledge about the Buddhist civilization and culture, which can only help deepen mutual

understanding amongst us. The ever-growing interaction amongst peoples of different faiths makes it more imperative that we move forward to learn about one another's cultures and civilizations at a deeper level. Civilizations have always been enriched by the exchange of knowledge and arts. As the Buddha himself once said,

> "There is no problem in existence which cannot be resolved with the right understanding and the right effort. Every problem, however, intricate, however complex, contains within itself the means for its own resolution."

Thirdly, the initiative represents our collective wish to cherish the diversity in our efforts to discover shared values. There is no doubt that globalization of technology, finance and information has resulted in people in different parts of the world being directly affected by each other's actions. But faster electronic interaction does not automatically lead people of different cultures to understand and respect one another. Other steps must complement electronic interaction. In a diverse organization such as the United Nations, only interaction between people of different faiths and cultures, understanding and respect for different civilizations can lead to a common approach to dealing with international issues. Therefore, this agenda item is one more step for the enrichment of the United Nations and us all.

Mr. Ali (Bangladesh): At the outset allow me to associate the delegation of Bangladesh with the statement made by the representative of Sri Lanka on International recognition of the Day of Vesak. My delegation considers it a privilege to speak on this item.

My delegation had the honour to speak on this item in the General Committee on 1 December 1999 when the members of that Committee assembled to consider the inclusion in the agenda of the fifty-fourth session the item entitled "International recognition of the Day of Vesak". We are gratified that the General Committee was able to recommend the inclusion in the agenda and subsequently the General Assembly agreed by consensus. Bangladesh had earlier joined others in proposing inclusion of this item through a co-signed letter.

In Asia and other parts of the world, people observe the Day of Vesak to celebrate the most sacred day in Buddhism. Millions of Buddhists all over the world commemorate the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha on this day.

Bangladesh is historically connected with Buddhist civilization. We have a sizeable Bud population. At the national level, we celebrate Bud festivals such as the Day of Vesak — Buddha Pur in our language — as national holidays.

As we are entering a new millennium, it is f that the world body is considering today the internat commemoration of the Day of Vesak. This will gi opportunities to relive the age-old sublime teachin the Buddha aimed at bringing about, and understan happiness and solace in the world. We are happy tha General Assembly is recognizing the Day of Vesak sacred day. We are also happy that the Vesak wi observed at United Nations Headquarters and al United Nations duty offices all over the world i appropriate manner.

I would like to mention here that my country i of the sponsors of draft resolution A/54/L.59, whic hope will be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Pradhan (Bhutan): My delegation is de'ig that the General Assembly has decided to take u issue of international recognition of the Day of Ves the United Nations. We wish to express our gratitu Sri Lanka for having taken the first steps to initiat process.

The introduction of this item at the Ge Assembly is timely and will contribute much toward success of other ongoing initiatives at the United Nati The year 2000 has been designated by the Ge Assembly as the International Year for the Cultur Peace, which will prepare the ground for the U Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations in 2 Both these years usher in the International Decade Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Childre the World. The promotion of tolerance and of respec diversity is a common thread that runs through all t cross-cutting commemorations. It is my delegati belief that international recognition of the contribut that Buddhism has made and continues to make to world will strengthen and further the objectives of t processes through the advancement of gr understanding and appreciation of the diversity in societies.

Mr. Ingólfsson (Iceland), Vice-President, took Chair.

In Bhutan and in the region of the Himalayas, this day is known as Sagadawa, and as Vaisakh in the Sanskrit and Indian tradition. This day, one of the most sacred to millions of Buddhists throughout the world, falls on the day of the full moon around May each year and marks three important events in the life of the Buddha. It was on this day that he was born, in 563 BC. It was on this day that he subsequently gained enlightenment, and it was also on this day that he entered the realm of Nirvana.

Siddhartha Gautama, more widely known as the Buddha, lived and preached from 563 BC to 480 BC in northern India, making Buddhism one of the oldest religions of mankind. His life and teachings have had a significant impact on other religions and on philosophy, morality and ways of life, beginning in Asia and spreading across to other continents.

The teachings of Buddhism are considered to be universal in nature. Buddhism propagates moderation in one's life, nonviolence, peaceful coexistence and tolerance. It teaches humans to safeguard and preserve resources and their natural environment as a means to respect the lives of all sentient beings. Many of these principles are akin to those of other major religions and to the fundamental principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

My delegation looks forward to participating in the international observances of Vesak at United Nations Headquarters and other United Nations offices. In view of the significance of this day to millions across the globe, we are confident that draft resolution A/54/L.59 will be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Flores (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation is a sponsor of the draft resolution on International recognition of the Day of Vesak at United Nations Headquarters because it believes that the Organization is a preferred forum to bring together the different religious, cultural and philosophical traditions that co-exist on our planet.

Recognition by the United Nations of the contribution made to humanity's spiritual patrimony by the various religions of the world is an indication of the commitment of Member States to the preservation of that patrimony in a spirit of active tolerance aimed at encouraging mutual understanding.

Mr. Mra (Myanmar): The Charter of the United Nations calls on us to practice tolerance and to live in peace with one another as good neighbours. The culture of tolerance eliminates a culture of violence and begets a culture of peace.

Lord Buddha teaches us the virtues of tolerance, compassion and peace. The teachings of Buddha have moved millions of people and have had a profound influence on the thought and life of the human race. Buddha's message of tolerance, compassion and peace provides the ethical and moral basis of many societies around the world.

H.G. Wells stated that Buddha gave a message to mankind that was universal in character, and that many of our best modern ideas are in closest harmony with it. Thus Buddhism, like other major religions, has contributed substantively to the prevalence of peace. It is most fitting that the United Nations, whose ultimate objective is also peace, provides us with an opportunity to bring the day most sacred to millions of Buddhists to the attention of the international community.

Furthermore, we believe that discussion of this item in this unique forum, in which different civilizations are represented, will contribute to a better understanding of the concept of a dialogue among civilizations.

The Day of Vesak — the Full Moon Day of May — is the most sacred day in Buddhism. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that the most significant events of Buddha's life uniformly fell on this particular day. It was on the Full Moon Day of May in the year 623 B.C. that a noble prince, destined to be one of the greatest religious teachers in the world, was born in Lumbini Park. After six strenuous years of struggle and search for the ultimate truth, again on the Full Moon Day of May, in his thirty-fifth year of ascetic life, Buddha attained enlightenment by his intuitive knowledge, enabling him to rid himself of all defilements of life.

After he attained Buddhahood, without keeping enlightenment to himself, Buddha devoted the remainder of his worthy life to the service of humanity, conveying his message of tolerance, compassion and peace to the human race. His service to humankind, his wisdom and compassion, and his exemplary personal life became the principal factors that compelled millions of people to hail Buddha as one of the greatest religious leaders that ever lived on earth. After having incessantly and tirelessly striven for the benefit of humankind, Buddha passed away on the Full Moon Day of May in his eightieth year.

As it is sacred to all Buddhists of the world, the Day of Vesak is a sacred occasion in Myanmar also and celebrated as Buddha's Day for its significant nature. A famous ceremony is held in Myanmar to commemorate Buddha's Day: the ceremonial watering of the Bo Tree, the tree under which Lord Gautama Buddha attained enlightenment. The ceremony takes place either early in the morning or in the evening of the day, with girls and women in their finest dresses carrying water in earthen pots in single file and watering the Bo Tree. The ceremony is accompanied by the playing of wind and percussion musical instruments, thus reflecting the auspicious nature of the Day.

Nearly 90 per cent of the population of Myanmar is Buddhist. As a sponsor of the draft resolution before us, we are encouraged by the support for giving the Day of Vesak the international recognition it deserves. We believe that the adoption of the draft would constitute a concrete acknowledgement of the contribution Buddhism has made for the benefit of mankind.

Mr. Shah (Nepal): Vesak Purnima, or the Full Moon Day of May, is a thrice-blessed day. On this auspicious day, in a span of 80 years over two and a half millennia ago, Gautama Buddha was born at Lumbini, attained enlightenment at Bodh Gaya and passed from physical form at Kusinagar.

The essence of Buddha's teachings concerns humanity, peace, compassion, tolerance and non-violence, the equality of all human beings, and respect for and non-denigration of each other and each other's beliefs — ideals so eloquently accented in the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, and ideals which are as relevant today as they have ever been over the centuries.

The unique significance of so sacred a day has made Vesak Purnima a symbol of the light of Buddha's teachings, which have travelled through the ages, beyond the high Himalayas and across continents, and inspired the lives of millions and millions of people who strive for, and believe in, the institution of peace and justice.

Lumbini today is a prominent World Heritage Site. The United Nations has historically been involved in the preservation and development of this holy Site. The International Buddhist Summit, held at Lumbini in December of last year, declared the birthplace of Buddha to be a fountain of peace. Vesak Purnima is also recognized in Nepal as Lumbini Day and observed as a national holiday — a day of non-violence on w public slaughter of animals is officially banned.

As the inheritor of this great cultural and r legacy, Nepal is more than honoured to be a spo the draft resolution contained in document A/54/ "International Recognition of the Day of Vesak most fitting that the draft resolution would h United Nations commemorate the Full Moon Day each year. By adopting this draft, the General As will have taken one additional step towards a cu peace and cross-civilizational understanding.

Mr. Haque (Pakistan): The land of Pakis historically been a meeting ground for different p religions, cultures and ideas. Geographically, P sits astride the traditional routes that link the peo South Asia with their neighbours in West Asia, Asia, China and the lands beyond. The inte between the many influences and civilizatio commingled in the area has led to the evolutio centuries, of a rich, complex and intricate soc cultural texture and ethos in my country.

The north-west of Pakistan was the home famous Buddhist Gandhara civilization, which flo around the first century B.C. This period also s birth of Gandhara art through a fusion of Greco- art and Buddhist traditions, resulting in the depic stone of various aspects of the life and teachings Buddha, which adorned thousands of stupa monasteries in the area.

The influence of Buddhism is not confined region; it extends to all parts of the world. The un appeal and message of Buddha finds its resona many corners of the world. The contribution of Bud to the culture, art and civilization of the peoples of Asia and beyond has been profound. The mess peace, compassion and truth given by Buddha is by most religions and systems of belief. His s vision of the Middle Path, calling for the avoida sin, acquiring of merit and purification of the reflects his noble message and his noble spirit.

My delegation is a sponsor of draft reso A/54/L.59. We strongly support international recog of the thrice-sacred Day of Vesak, commemorati birth of Buddha, his attainment of enlightenment a passing away. The recognition of the Day of Ve the United Nations would be a fitting acknowledg

of the contribution of Buddhism to the spiritual development of mankind.

Mr. Sharma (India): Although we spoke on this issue in the meeting of the General Committee when the proposal to observe the Day of Vesak came before it, we are taking the floor once again to convey to the full membership our deep satisfaction that the proposal by the delegation of Sri Lanka for international recognition of the Day of Vesak has been adopted by the Committee.

The appearance of the Buddha was one of the transformative events in the history of mankind and has shaped the spiritual, moral and ethical values of the world. As such, it is appropriate that a day of recognition for this transcendent and defining occurrence in our shared civilizational heritage should be earmarked, and that it be honoured and observed in this most representative of all bodies of the global community, which seeks to inform its actions with universal moral and ethical concern.

In fact, universalism of enlightenment, which can be reached through individual effort by any person, is at the core of the Buddha's teachings, which have touched countless millions of lives with salvation and hope. To recall such ennobling and eternal legacies in our shared heritage is to inspire us in seeking the highest goals of our collective striving. We congratulate the delegation of Sri Lanka for its initiative, and we hope to participate actively in the observance of Vesak within the United Nations.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/54/L.59. I should like to announce that since its introduction, the following countries have become sponsors: Greece, Lesotho, Mauritius, Nicaragua, Norway, Turkey and the United States.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/54/L.59?

The draft resolution A/54/L.59 was adopted (resolution 54/115).

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 174?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.